



The  
Little  
Book of  
**GOVERNING**  
the city

Paul Honeybone, Brian Collins, Katie Barnes,  
Ellie Cosgrave and the Liveable Cities Team

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ISBN 978-1-86220-348-8

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# Acknowledgements

This is the result of work conducted as part of the *Liveable Cities Programme*, funded by the UK Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) under grant EP/J017698/1. We wish to thank Andrew Chilvers, Naji Makarem, Jonathan Ward, Jenny MacArthur and Corina Kwami for input and comments. We acknowledge our broader Liveable Cities team and the discussions and deliberations across a range of workstreams that have added something to the mix. We are also appreciative for the layout and production ably and swiftly delivered by Mike Stead at Imagination Lancaster.

By way of a customary disclaimer, any short exposition about what a complex phenomenon is – in this case city governance – and how we might go about making improvements to it, will contain omissions and be an incomplete offering. It is the product of a point of view constrained by limits of space, time and imagination. This work is no exception. The stances taken and any errors are our own.

We do not claim or pursue originality in any specific idea or concept. Nor do we, or can we, deeply develop and reference the origins of the ideas and concepts we assemble. Rather, we simply hope to articulate the direction of development we see as important. Our hope is that we affirm the activities complementary to our view, while helping the reader reflect on their own experience to consider those that are not. If we achieve that, plus stimulate further investigation and newfound determination to make a difference, we are pleased to help.

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November 2017

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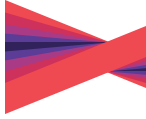
# What this little book tells you

With an engaged audience in mind – those of us grappling with how to progress governing the city – this little book informs you of our thoughts coming out of the *Liveable Cities Programme*. We aim to stimulate thought and reflection among people who think about, work with or take a leadership role in urban governance, management and oversight. While a Little Book in format, we do not avoid tackling the big issues!

Working from the premise that city governance is about (i) who decides; (ii) how we decide; and (iii) what happens when we decide, we expand on the perspective that:

- As they always have, cities are unique and essential sites of competition and collaboration to advance our economy and culture.
- Innovative cities are relatively dynamic, open and mixed spaces of experimentation.
- The governance of cities can benefit from taking a systems view to understand the diversity of service functions and networks that interact and shape what we can achieve together.
- City governance models need to evolve with current improvements while driving for a more future-focused practice.
- New arrangements also need to better reflect finding a shared purpose and agreed civic direction within cities to constructively guide a positive future.

# Introduction



***“Governance matters in organising for success”***

How we organise and collectively steer our societies is shaped and influenced by the practice of governance. It is as simple and as big as how we navigate and choose where we go together. This raises questions about where to go, how to go about the journey or expedition, and what to do when we think we have arrived. This can be challenging for us all even at an individual or family level. At a collective level, as is the work of governance, it can also be difficult. At its best, it can be delightful and uplifting as we find unity and common purpose as results come to life. At its worst, it can be conflict-ridden, draining and divisive.

Despite advances, how to govern a city today is a complex undertaking. There is much potential and many tantalising possibilities for improvement, alongside deep and enduring problems. If the practice of governing, at its simplest, is overseeing an issue and deciding what to do, we can do this in ways that are enabling, empowering and result in transformative improvements. Or we can drift sideways or go backwards, assuming we agree what is happening!

## *Cities are underperforming*

The way we govern places is influenced by our history, when rural and regional politics held sway. Today, the issues and politics of the urban increasingly holds our governing attention. There is an immediacy and intensity from the ground-up for the issues cities face, putting urban governance under pressure to deal with everything from micro-concerns to macro-dilemmas.

There are a wide variety of systems of governance operating in cities. These oversee and influence formal mechanisms, like legislation and taxation, alongside informal factors, such as individual attitudes and societal norms. Our challenge is to guide and ‘engineer’ these systems to align with, and support, improvements to liveability in cities. In so doing, new and revised systems of governance that are both transformative (sometimes radical) and incremental (not-so-radical) interventions

may surface. As they currently exist, some of these systems of governance constrain what we do and at worst work against the beneficial changes that we need to make.

Given what we technically know, we are often grappling with the reality of failures and ‘sub-optimal’ outcomes that we should be able to remedy or achieve. Often what happens is an under-performance to deliver, which comes from governance-level shortcomings. Many of the issues of our time are shortfalls in this regard; for example, unaffordable urban living due to housing and transport costs, and ecosystem degradation due to pollution.

This under-performance is being accentuated by both the nature and rate of change in society and the economy. This is highly relevant as we seek to improve what we have, and what we know, whilst better understanding and actively dealing with any downside implications, for example, globalised trade competition and climate change. At the same time, we experience tensions between our current and traditional economic and social ways of doing things and our new ways. This can result in a variety of reactions or change processes, from quiet evolution by stealth, to transparent and seamless transitions, or head-on confrontation that damages social capital and openness to change.

Often, once we have grasped and start looking into a situation, it takes time for decisions to get made, and then for system changes to be deployed and taken up. At many levels, it is fair to conclude that our key institutions are not always ‘fit-for-purpose’ and the timing of responses causes problematic lags.

## *Success in the urban age*

Living in what is commonly known as the ‘urban age’, we face new governance issues across the board in the UK. Levels of responsibility and accountability for different issues, and the boundaries of these concerns, are being constantly considered and negotiated. Successful cities share many characteristics that they owe to factors like physical location, histories of enterprise and the flourishing of culture. The world has many successful cities; however, we can do better and make continuous improvements.

To realise the potential of our governance practices, cities need decision-makers who are vibrant, adaptive, resilient, well-informed, observant, constructively self-critical and self-aware. They are likely to be exemplars of compassion and courage, with the



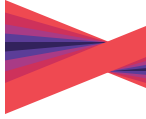
open-mindedness to face different futures and pursue a new level of local possibility. Likewise, their ability to understand the world of finance allows them to make good use of a city's resources, leverage partnerships and maintain investment confidences.

Being able to handle differing viewpoints and informing decisions at key points in a city's journey is central to the governance challenge. This requires excellence in civic-minded and commercial thinking coming together. There will be difficult tensions between the head and the heart.

### *A learning journey*

When governing, we think it is best to think and act as if on a 'learning journey', because significant change will continue. This requires the ability to see things in new ways to really understand what is happening, then acting in a clear and decisive fashion. This demands courage, integrity and a particular style of leadership to drive big change as well as understand where to retreat or abstain from involvement. Like the learning journey our cities must engage with, we hope you will join us as we share our learning about how to contribute to improving the governance of our cities.

# Governing is



***“Our governance structures and practices are changing and need to increasingly change to realise our potential across the board”***

Governance is about three fundamental things: (i) who decides, (ii) how we make decisions, and (iii) what happens when we decide. It is central to how we unlock numerous opportunities and remedy the problems of our time, and how we stabilise a crisis or stimulate innovation. Or more importantly, how we set-up arrangements to understand and advance both at once.

Broadly, governance is overseeing activities to guide, steer and monitor progress. In the UK context, public sector and civic governance assumes operating in a democratic system with structures and protocols that have developed and been refined over time in the Westminster system. This requires some degree of ‘voice’ for people as citizens, a right to ‘vote’ and implies a degree of freedom or liberty within the legal framework.

We work from a core premise that the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of democratic governance can be improved. In essence, we see many gaps between the current systems of governance and what might be an optimal situation. Where there is excellence in governance on a particular issue, we can see a connection between aspirations and reality alongside a clear story about the purpose and (un)certainly of the journey, and an active discussion about what it means to make improvements.

## *The practice of governing*

Governance is about more than government. It includes private resources and the associated choices and practices, along with the collective actions of society. It remains that formal, public institutions and processes are important, as public sector activity manages the rules of the game, sets priorities and directs resources. This plays a key role in mobilising efforts to respond and adapt to big problems, or shocks, as well as keep us functioning at a day-to-day level.

Governance includes formal and informal activities. These open and shape, as well as constrain, how we attend to immediacies ahead, what we anticipate is coming and enduring issues. What we do is influenced by our past, institutional histories and conventions encoded in law, as well as embodied in our cultural norms and social behaviour. City governance profoundly matters for our current and future 'grasp' of, and 'grip' on, the situations we face that are paramount for our quality of life and survival. Formal government functions include the following:

- *Delivery* – a wide range of direct delivery through government services supported by policy-making, such as taxation functions, policing, strategy and regulation
- *Outsourcing* – not-for-profit and for-profit sources of provision, like social services and education
- *Partnerships* – taking various forms from working on social problems between organisations to contractual obligations to deliver services over the long-term, like community infrastructure
- *Monitoring* – review for active learning and awareness to make real-time and future improvements. It could result in identifying new issues e.g. making room for innovation or identifying unmet needs.

Embracing and invigorating democratic processes are a cornerstone to attaining the best solutions that build confidence in the future. What a successful and trustworthy UK urban democracy needs to evolve into is an open question, requiring further civic dialogue. It is the case that excellent governance is almost always supported by:

- A process of participation informed by civic engagement
- A range of views on the table, including current and anticipated (future) perspectives
- A number of interacting variables being accounted to reflect connectivity in practice
- A recognition of knowledge limits and consideration of the unknowns
- A systematic approach to richly informing decisions with knowledge and evidence

- A clear and transparent decision-making and review process with high visibility, and
- A commitment to unambiguous and timely communications.

Finding a shared direction, despite and because of many visions and values, is a critical governance challenge to address the multitude of opportunities and challenges faced. Our form of democracy does not require a rigid adherence to one way or a forced majority rule; rather, a mode of dynamic oversight with deeper listening for enlarged engagement, with the potential of enhancement with ‘smart’ data and technical tools.

A plurality of systems, networks and actors involved in city governance make a single model impossible, much less desirable. Working with this multi-polarity, using integrated modular approaches and adaptive strategies, will yield results. This pre-supposes that ethical conduct underpins practice. We like the timeless Nolan Principles.<sup>1</sup>

### *Good governance with purpose*

High quality urban governance makes a profound difference to both people’s day-to-day lives and to development within a city. Good governance is where:

- Institutions are corruption-free and capable of acting in the public good
- Public agencies are effective and efficient, requiring capacity and expertise
- Local groups and civic interests are assisted by public agencies and non-governmental organisations to meaningfully contribute
- Private sector interests deliver value as well as understand and attend to their negative by-products and side effects
- An appropriate learning culture of tolerance, cooperation and compassion is actively adopted and encouraged

<sup>1</sup> The Nolan Principles are the Seven Principles of Public Life, namely: *Selflessness, Integrity, Objectivity, Accountability, Openness, Honesty, and Leadership*. For more information: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life>

- Solutions to persistent and rapidly unfolding problems are found within the creative tension between stability and certainty on the one hand, and adaption and innovation on the other
- Once found, solutions or opportunities are acted on at an appropriate scale.

Governing with purpose requires a connection between a shared purpose and people within and outside formal government functions. We need a mission to believe in, so we motivate positive action that allows us to live our values in states of transition. Inspiring and satisfying citizens requires setting directions and providing leadership in contexts of uncertainty. While not straightforward, a stronger sense of inclusive direction and a clearer articulation of common purpose can help orient and align our concerns, conditions and processes of change to ‘push and pull’ for the greater good.

### *Platform-based and traditional economic realities*

Effective governance must recognise and deal with both traditional modes of economic activity, alongside the new dominance and continuing emergence of the platform, gig, and circular economies. Government agencies and functions at all levels need to become more proficient at moving with and between these ‘modes’. The more traditional mode needs ongoing legislative review, for example, pollution mitigation for transport, while the new mode requires new areas of focus, such as digital citizenship and the night-time economy. Both require strategies, policies and regulations, albeit in different frameworks to continuously improve outcomes.

Platforms can create new public value by enabling others to solve issues. There is potential to create modular and scalable solutions with higher autonomy where a lighter touch from government garners better overall results. Governing has to become about enabling or providing leadership for communities of interest to self-organise and regulate where necessary. Rights, responsibilities and accountabilities are important issues as we engage for example, with what our ‘digital social contract’ needs to become.

# Governing our cities today



***“Successful urban governance means fostering new levels of shared understanding about our civic challenges, leading and promoting innovative responses, and building local capacity to ensure continuous improvements.”***

Within regional constellations of towns and rural areas, cities are key sites for organising life in the United Kingdom. How cities are governed is the combination of a range of organisations, rules and cultures interacting in various distinct and interwoven ways. There are institutions and networks of people working together – and sometimes apart – as we strive to attain a people-centred, knowledge-informed, purpose-driven and future-focused urban reality.

How we make sense of these organising arrangements, what we choose to do about them and our idea of citizenship in a democratic society profoundly affects what we do and how we decide what is best for us. Democratic governance encompasses deciding what is acceptably “good enough for now” given circumstances, and our level of ambition for change, given the present context. Plus, it is where we determine the direction and rate of change we wish to pursue into the future. Who ‘we’ are in this and how ‘we’ are engaged is critical.

## *The global and local meet*

Cities are inescapably entangled in national, international, as well as local level affairs. Global uncertainties can have an impact on resource availability for example. Unclear national economic conditions within which to plan and invest impinge on the operating context. At the local level, polarised views can divide

multiple ‘communities of interest’ making coherence problematic and fragmentation a tangible risk.

This context impacts on the way cities relate with central government and citizens in their localities. Cities have to work closely with central government, which means both operating within current settings while overcoming constraints. Cities and regions can experience ‘moments’ where deals for new arrangements can be made. The UK remains in one of these moments, where cities have to actively negotiate and step up to demonstrate their potential to invest and deliver across the board. This, in part, depends on national government’s will and focus to work with others and establish new arrangements.

Like Mike Emmerich (*Britain’s Cities, Britain’s Future*, 2017), we think it is a crucial time for cities to push forward and extend their influence. Developing distributed strength within and across the network of UK cities is vital, as our cities can be more robust and resilient to help with forthcoming local, national and global issues. Taking cues from Josef Konvitz (2016), overhauling the relations between the national and sub-national levels of government can also be complemented by supporting activities, such as forming cross-jurisdictional programmes and aligning budget and funding cycles.

### *A new citizenship*

Cities, of course, also have to work closely with citizens. They create opportunities where local people can become engaged, informed, involved and empowered to help realise possibilities and solve problems. Citizens that have to be thought about include those who do not own property and those who are not already organised. We talk of citizenship as a broad descriptor of people with an interest or stake in a place, probably as a resident but not exclusively (e.g. a frequent visitor). Cities need all the supporters and champions they can muster as more active citizens help engagement and understanding for better governance. Using techniques that support deliberative democracy and civic learning can take the weight off decision-makers by preparing cities for change, making changes and anchoring changes.

### *Positioning cities for success*

To consider the question, ‘How is a city best to position itself for success?’, we want to

talk about three key ingredients:

### **(1) Fostering understanding**

Combining the best general knowledge and specific ‘know-how’ is essential to intelligent progress. Fostering understanding means:

- *Knowledge-rich environments* – driving a wide and deep appreciation of situations and issues to help produce quality knowledge (to better understand ecological, human and financial implications), while being vigilant about data-overload and striving for clear communications.
- *Public sector role flexibility* – agencies have to possess the ability to be active knowledge brokers, network organisers and contributors, facilitators and entrepreneurs where appropriate to deliver what is needed.
- *Long-run commitment to urban places* – accepting our communities as they are and attending to a long view is important in generating the knowledge and relationships that lead to genuine change for quality outcomes over time.

### **(2) Promoting innovation and ingenuity**

Innovation and ingenuity in a variety of ways is vital for local urban development and national progress. This means:

- *Experimentation* – having the courage to ‘try the untried’ and allow risk-taking is important in some circumstances. This means we may not always ‘get it right first time’ but can embrace a ‘growth mindset’, where if you believe you can still learn and develop, you understand that making effort and taking risks makes you stronger. There needs to be political leeway for a degree of failure. Experimentation should be done in a ‘controlled’ way, sensitive to risks and transferring learning.
- *Learning from successful practice* – recognising every context and situation is unique, being ‘on the lookout’ for what may be transferable from near and afar to either help new initiatives or make existing activities better. When a transfer of skills combines with an awareness of local conditions, learning can be seeded or accelerated in some circumstances.
- *Well-governed and managed processes* – actively leading or providing support to embed new thinking into practice can make a substantial difference. This can



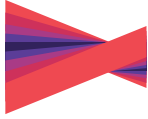
require being decisive to make quick shifts to avoid losses, or deliberately taking a measured approach to allow adaptation. It often means resisting ‘fiddling at margins’ before the results are in with longer-term initiatives.

### **(3) Building capacity**

If formal organisations do not have the ability to ‘think, learn, do and review’, much potential is lost before getting started. Paying attention to building civic capacity to underpin leadership is important for the knowledge it brings and better implementation. To build capacity means:

- *Competency in all communications* – having the organisational ability to communicate in the right ways at the right times to share thinking, test ideas and secure support and legitimacy.
- *Technical skills and knowledge* – vital for informed design and delivery across the board, often drawing on codified and tacit knowledge. This can relate to the design of governance processes and specialist advice such as legal or engineering knowledge.
- *Public sector continuity* – without being resistant to change, it is important to build on what we already know. That is, to facilitate what might be done and to carry the ‘memory’ of what has been tried before to benefit from that experience. We require agility to systematically pursue the ‘workable and possible’ on the ground, without undue constraint to continuously stretch for higher goals.

# A fresh way to think, act and do



***“As the ways we think, act and connect continue to change at pace, the areas we put under prioritisation and the way we do that will draw the line between success and failure”***

To lead cities well so they function increasingly better now and into the future, means thinking in new ways. We have to, of course, also translate great ideas into action and delivery. In this section, we outline a range of live ‘practice issues’ that can benefit from the right ‘habits of mind’. We think seeing the city as a system is necessary, and that this ‘systems reality’ requires us to think hard about our ethos when governing. While not suggesting fixed ways to think and act in city governance, we do venture so far as to outline the style of leadership and thinking we consider best aligns with current realities.

## *Five practice issues*

What are our top priority ‘practice issues’ for city governments today? We see the following ‘live’ challenges:

- *Producing a compelling longer-term direction:* this is the challenge of how to act to create – and keep re-producing – some form of agreed ‘big picture’. As what we see determines what we do, working on what we see as a shared direction that can be honed into a collective journey that is widely understood and signed-up

for, will impact on results. To be effective, we must act in ways where the shared direction is aspirational but not too abstract, has specific outcomes named, yet retains some in-built flexibility so as to not prevent new possibilities.

- *Showing how present actions relate to the 'big picture'*: the challenge of how to communicate and deliver a collaborative, real-time commitment and to act in the 'now', for both direct forward steps and experimentation that may lead to necessary changes, on the journey towards the long-run 'big picture'.
- *Leadership to be able to connect-up and switch between modes and the 'big picture'*: the challenge of acting with integrity and agility to marry actionable activity in the present with the long-view. There has to be creative tension within which we operate, recognising different economic modes and priorities. This helps us stretch forward and renew as we develop. Dealing honestly with these tensions requires courage and principled conduct and communication.
- *A commitment to systematically trying out new ways of doing things*: the challenge of having a governance culture, supporting organisations and networks that can enable creative discovery and delivery. These processes of innovation have to be backed-up with rigorous testing and systematic experimentation. Finding the balance between open discovery and disciplined delivery is key.
- *A commitment to learning and striving for understanding*: this is the challenge of a culture of investment in knowledge production. This requires not making assumptions about what we automatically know and understand. It means recognising and weighing-up a range of contradictory perspectives, then making transparent decisions where it makes sense, based on good-quality information and advice. Part of the challenge is also to appreciate when there is no evidence, or it is not viable to have it in-time. The learning then is to make sure this is not a hurdle to achieving a 'best for now' result to work ambitiously within current realities.

## *Treating the city as a system*

If a city is conceived of as a system of inter-connected parts, then to oversee the coordination of the system requires ways of thinking, organising and delivering decisions about who decides and how we decide what to do (or not to do). The governance of cities can benefit from embracing a systems-oriented view to

understand the array of services, functions and networks that interact and shape what we can achieve together. As we find ourselves in increasingly complex and uncertain times, a systems view helps with establishing a common language.

We suggest that politicians and experts can benefit from seeing the world as dynamic, event-driven and complex, as well as through a more traditional, mechanistic lens where processes are more stable and predictable. How we see influences our approach to what needs to be understood, and how to navigate effectively in decision-making. If we conceive of the urban as a mix of ‘open’ and ‘closed’ systems, then we work on the basis that we can generally understand what is happening on a continuum from:

Closed systems are:	Open situations are:
routine, predictable and repeatable	arbitrary, organic and shifting
relative simple and controllable	relatively complex and unable to be “turned off”
relatively stable external environments	dynamic, complex and variable external environments
where structured methods and specifics work	where holistic appreciation of effective patterns work
optimisable and lean, with less redundancy	resilience-oriented with freedom and some redundancy
more 1-dimensional and linear in design	more 3-dimensional and cyclical in design

Source: derived from Beauteument and Broenner, 2011

To navigate within and between closed and open systems, working with better knowledge of nodes, networks and system dynamics is key. This means trying to understand and consider the context and arrangements that might help guide better system stability or productivity on one hand, or more system flexibility and disruption on the other. Striking the right balance in each decision requires being sensitive to risks and an understanding of the best direction of travel.

If we conceived of the city as a system, it brings into focus:

### Conceiving the city as a system for excellent governance

A systems orientation that conceives:	Bringing into governance focus:
<b>Platforms and networks</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Seeing cities as physically and digitally connected platforms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The structure of networks and dynamics of flows</li> <li>- The relationships between networks</li> </ul>
<b>Connectivity and interdependencies</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Seeing cities as a complex mesh of connected interactions at human, economic and technological levels</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The nature and meaning of interactions</li> <li>- The implications of changing patterns of connectivity</li> </ul>
<b>Self-organisation and distributed designs</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Seeing cities as merging nodes for decentralised elements of wider systems (e.g. food production) and as distribution modes that adhere to sub-system logics outside local government (e.g. supermarket provisions)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The significant, 'non-governmental' sphere of activity that is essential to a functioning city</li> <li>- The issues, relationships and implications that require more or less governance focus</li> </ul>
<b>Evolutionary change and adaptiveness</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Seeing cities as being in a constant state of flux, modifying to their wider context and responding to internal activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rates and timing of change</li> <li>- When stresses might trigger instabilities or build better resilience</li> </ul>
<b>Anticipatory practice and responsiveness</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Seeing cities as both reacting to emergent risks and opportunities, but also anticipating possibilities with future-focused thinking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The value of increasing attention and investment into looking ahead</li> <li>- The value of preparedness for a range of potential adversities</li> </ul>

Effectively governing in this sense requires awareness of both network forms and institutional structures. Questions for decision-makers to ask include: Are there traditional and hierarchical arrangements with particular power implications for change? Or are there more horizontal, distributed and integrated networks making adaptation easier? Are current institutional arrangements helpful in navigating different types of journeys, from broad, exploratory investigations to specific targeted actions? What is the best way to make headway given particular circumstances?

## *Our “keeping going” ethos*

As we never have the luxury of stopping and re-setting the multitude of urban systems that need to evolve and re-align, whatever we can do has to be done ‘on the move’. Likewise, we cannot re-think how we govern and not take account of current settings. How we go about making changes while on the move is always a necessary reality check.

As we engage in the oversight of our urban work, a culture and attitude of continuous learning is central to the ethos we see as a necessary condition for progress. To develop this further, we outline five dimensions of ‘keeping going’, which we see as underpinning doing urban governance. These can be thought of as guiding behaviours or attitudes for action, which can be drawn upon, depending on circumstances:

### **(1) Keeping going and upgrading ‘guidance systems’**

Not only do governments and most forms of governance have to deal with changing personnel, our organisations also have to deal with many system-level changes (e.g. IT systems, procurement). We also have to deal with ‘upgrades’ while maintaining leadership. Here, we think the intelligent use of ‘city labs’ to simulate and safely test can make sense. There is significant scope for these types of resources to be developed for exemplar pilots to deliver governance improvements. Part of ensuring value from these investments, is to roll-out pilot activities into live operation so that changes are genuinely embedded and resources not duplicated.

### **(2) Keeping going and innovating**

As we have said, enabling innovation is important to develop new solutions and design thinking for creativity has a great deal to add to the endeavour of governing at all levels. We have to have the confidence to allow others and ourselves to ‘bend’, ‘break’ and ‘blend’ (Brandt & Eagleman, 2017). We believe governance is where calculated risks of the unknown have to be intelligently taken, factoring in societal aspirations, fiscal considerations and institutional parameters.

### **(3) Keeping going and adapting operations**

Consistent with our ethos where continuous learning and ‘change on the go’ is paramount, we see that managing the direction and rate of change needs to be well-

informed by the actual conditions being worked within.

Responsiveness to real-time conditions is critical to staying on-track. In terms of our urban future, we propose that shifting from the ‘Keep calm and carry on’ ethic to ‘Stay alert and change pace’ approach, reflects the necessary sentiment of our times for cities to face the reality of the future and evolve in ways that ensure they improve.

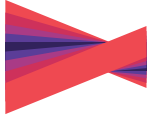
#### **(4) Keeping going in the face of uncertainty**

How we respond in complex situations can set us up for a range of results. In circumstances that are unclear, we often just simply need to keep going with what we are doing, particularly if we know no better ways and are not doing harm. On the other hand, sometimes we even have to have the courage to just stop particular ideas or activities. We know that breakthrough accomplishments and insights often occur unexpectedly from inaction or unplanned space. They also tend to occur where positive leadership has reduced our natural anxieties about change. At times we simply have to accept that diligence without overarching awareness is enough (Chia, 2012).

#### **(5) Keeping going when we realise we don’t know**

Sometimes we have to realise that we do not know what we thought we did. This may mean seeking further advice, different ideas and asking difficult questions. As the state of the knowledge about the city can never be perfect – it is emergent and evolving – peace must be made about the lack of comprehensiveness of understanding. Alongside an ability to cope with ambiguity and possess a state of mind to recognise limits, quality leadership also involves recognising that it can be almost impossible to really ‘know’. The process of coming to this realisation, despite knowledge to-hand and investments made, and then reassessing what to do next, is an important part of governing where wisdom is invoked. As Ikujiro Nonaka and colleagues state: “To be wise is to be learned about our ignorance” (Nonaka et al., 2014).

# A fresh way to govern



***“As the way we think and connect continues to change at pace, the way we arrange our institutions, public realm and politics has to transform to meet the challenges of our time”***

Guiding and re-inventing the cities that will serve us well in the near and far future calls for renewed governance. This means different style and content is required, often with different formal arrangements to effectively grasp issues and deliver improvements. The wide array of people and positions involved in guiding a city face hard decisions with far-reaching consequences, as they all try to keep their functions – and the city as a whole – actively evolving.

This is while advancing the tensions between improving liveability, equality of opportunity, growing productivity and resilience to recover from shocks. Key drivers having an impact on these tensions include population shifts, cultural expectations of provision and technological developments. This is happening in a context where participation expectations are increasing, be they from residents or visitors in the role of consumers or citizens.

## *Leadership insights for progress*

When considering the big challenges for leadership in cities, we believe that, to work both ‘in’ and ‘on’ the governance system, we have to think hard about three leadership fundamentals:



## **(1) Achieving greater strategic coherence**

Strategic coherence or alignment between urban actors is hard to achieve. Each actor may have a different conception of how to define an issue, how to attribute value, what solutions are required and what are the priorities for action. As we grapple between existing and emerging issues, differing views between actors can make negotiations to connect strategy with action difficult for a myriad of reasons.

### **So what might help?**

- *A different style of politics*: a less combative and more collaborative approach where we have a new and dynamic ‘theatre of collaboration’, demonstrating activities aimed at achieving common purpose, rather than an old and outdated ‘theatre of conflict’ where hostile (and often futile) interaction dominates. This opens-up chances to work together on issues-based solutions. This can re-enliven politics and draw the best out of our partisan legacies.
- *A commitment to connecting strategy to grounded practice with better transparency*: a practical ethos to get strategy-making endeavours cascading vertically (up and down levels) and horizontally (across) to support informed action, resulting in the structural alignment of decision-making processes with common purpose.
- *A flexible ‘license to operate’ within shared, high-level goals*: to give permission and support dynamic adaptation and learning-informed progress that works to confirm shared understanding, connectivity and questing for cultural progress.

## **(2) Improved institutional frameworks**

Much governmental practice today is vexed in terms of its capacity to respond with enough agility to fundamental, long-term issues. While short-termism and popular immediacies to maintain a governing agenda often outweigh serious, long-run problems, the design and culture of government is inadequate to neutralise or counteract these forces. Many governmental agencies and bodies are questionably not ‘fit for purpose’ to do the nature of work that we now need them to attend to at pace. This is particularly the case with the identification of, grappling with and taking active steps for, the resolution of big, connected, long-run opportunities and problems, such as social inequality or poor productivity.

### **So what might help?**

- *A continued and accelerated commitment to city-region devolution:* the phased movement of power and resources downwards in the UK can help grow local capacity and capability. This helps to facilitate connected, engaged and responsible communities for innovative solutions. It will also help build city leadership. Furthermore, to realise the opportunity requires a different level of involvement in the city's future from those currently not engaged, for example, through proactive investment in citizen education.
- *A re-focussed national governance framework that aligns with the demands of providing collaborative strategic leadership:* the exploration of the nation-state level of design of the formal public governance system. This may lead to new developments and constitutional reform for more dynamic arrangements.
- *A deep and real commitment to the long-term:* an extended, temporal consideration of most key public policy issues, informed by an unprecedented investment in systematic foresight generation and a genuine, carefully exercised commitment to the wellbeing of future generations.

### **(3) Advancing an aligning style of leadership**

Many current system improvements in cities do not enjoy majority support from those acting to maintain present interests, or even those interested in transformative solutions to enhance performance. Often the lack of resolution of contradictory and incomplete ideas renders the attainable aspects of actual change underwhelming. Visionary leadership is relatively rare, as the forces of navigating local 'realities' with short timeframes can temper well-intentioned boldness. Meanwhile, the need to understand and respond to issues through appropriate governance measures grows, opening up gaps that become increasingly difficult to bridge. An aligning style of leadership for a connected mesh of distributed innovation requires great political leadership, but also great and committed support networks.

### **So what might help?**

- *Acting for the common good:* often requiring 'distributed intelligence' combined with a culture of openness and encouragement to lead courageously. This directly confronts the nature of much political activity, as many solutions

do not neatly fit into the traditional underpinning political divisions that continue to act as a default stance in the face of uncertainty.

- *A commitment to a consensus on sound analytics*: investment in and processes for producing agreed metrics and measurement so the evidence is ‘valid’, believed, accessible, transparent and, therefore, taken seriously. This may take new partnerships and creative arrangements to activate a variety of resources to get something fit-for-purpose that becomes an embedded feature of civic life.
- *Public engagement and forgiveness of ‘people of action’*: broad community engagement and a civic maturity to allow leaders to learn, evolve, update and change. This way, they can grow as they learn through intelligent and valid experimentation, with real feedback based on evaluation and sound analysis, rather than shrouded political calculus.

## *Areas for critical attention*

As we advance in a unique phase of our history, we believe that a number of things need to happen, including making energy cleaner, making transport and buildings more energy efficient, improving public health, reducing pollution, enhancing infrastructure and amenities to lift social outcomes and providing more affordable housing. Responding to this context, we identify five critical areas that illustrate some of the issues that we think all cities need to be highly attentive to:

- Transport and mobility
- Smart cities and IT infrastructures
- Urban regeneration and housing
- Low carbon economy and ecosystems
- Resilience and security

What do these key areas have in common? They represent the pressure points that are currently occurring in cities. They also represent the opportunities for a wide range of governmental, not-for-profit and for-profit operators to self-organise and provide distributed responses. Finally, they represent the points at which critical decisions are made around liveability, which we see as being about inclusivity and equality, a better distribution of resources, civic trust and collective potential. We briefly explore three areas:

## Transport and mobility

As cities expand and demand for urban mobility intensifies, public transit, roads and other forms of infrastructure face greater strains on public resources. In an era of transforming mobility services, urban areas can benefit from new technologies to improve everyday travel. Reaching a decision about the level of public provision and user-charging, and the use of private investment and partnerships, is often difficult. Working together, we get to decide and deliver the urban form, the level of social participation, and the cultural fabric in these decisions.

### Spotlight on experimentation:

*Transport for London (TfL) launched the Accelerator programme in 2017.*



Source unknown

Working with six technology start-ups and the *Transport Research Laboratory*, TfL is focusing on using big data to inform service provision. These innovations range from ridesharing to machine learning for the analysis of travel behaviour. Trials are underway to improve bus safety by re-designing signalling and testing autonomous emergency braking systems.

## Smart cities and IT infrastructures

There is an opportunity to use ubiquitous urban sensing, big data and analytics to better understand the real-time functioning of our cities and help longer-term planning and policy decisions. For example, smart electricity grids could enable efficiency within our energy infrastructure.

However, we need to be technologically capable to deliver these services and engineer these infrastructures. The realities of commissioning and delivering smart infrastructure services are not straightforward. City governments are faced with the

challenge of exploring the economics of smart city investment, the business models and the value that it brings to citizens. They must also be good at de-coding different options for funding, measurement and reporting alongside thinking about what this means for their organisational structure, their operational requirements and their responsibilities (Cosgrave et al, 2014). On top of this, city governors must understand how these investments align with existing local and national political priorities and strategies. This is not trivial: it is about cities responding with appropriate applications that develop their functionality and safety, building up their unique identity, reputation and integrity.

New, 'smart' technologies will be best when they are information-rich, interconnected and offer flexibility for modular development into the future. Many drivers are forcing city governments to take action now. The smart city is about using real and feasible technologies via sustainable business models to have a direct and measurable impact on citizens, service delivery and business.

**Spotlight on best practice:**

Read our *Delivering the Smart City* report, developed jointly with Arup under the *Liveable Cities* banner:



Sourced from: City Resilience Index. The Rockefeller Foundation/ARUP

## **Resilience and security**

In the UK, our lives are sustained by unprecedented access to clean water, electricity, food, health care and a wide range of other commodities. When disasters strike, critical infrastructure networks can fail. Recovery typically depends on utility sectors working together. In order for this to always happen, we need systemic approaches to investment in resilience that means all nodes in the network are equally resilient. As single sectors cannot function without their partner sectors, particularly in highly-disrupted environments, coordinated planning and engagement is critical. A focus on operations, to ensure that each sector addresses its mission and planning, is also necessary.

### **Spotlight on network development:**

*The 100 Resilient Cities Network* has produced guidance material to help city leaders. This approach gives cities a resilience index and allows them to put in-place an improvement programme according to their context.



Sourced from: <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/steapp/docs/delivering-the-smart-city>

## ***A refreshed style of city leadership***

Our view is that the implications of what we have outlined provides a serious and significant challenge to current governing practices and structures. Doing exemplary urban governance requires excellent connecting, sharing, brokering, negotiating and mediating to advance inclusive local change. It requires vision, clarity, strength

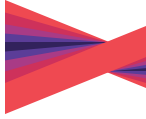
of resolve and courage to ‘get out of the way’ and to sometimes ‘get in the way’ of change.

Purposeful leadership means working out what to lead and resource, what to lead and not resource and what to resource and not lead. We value the importance of guiding with both knowledgeable intention and reflective wisdom as indicative of this style. It also means that, to provide ‘smart’ oversight, we need a new focus at the ‘top table’ of local government.

We think it is safe to say that the ‘governance grip’ on some issues is too indirect and ‘loose’. For example, despite there being an understanding of the benefits of integrated city-regional infrastructure plans, there are few strategic governance priorities reflecting a shared strategy of critical infrastructure resilience at a Combined Authority level yet (Honeybone et al, 2017).

Other areas suffer from ‘governance grip’ being too direct and ‘tight’. This nullifies creativity, which cramps or stifles civic and private entrepreneurialism. This predicament requires a new type of response from local government, building on the current threads of change. For example, devolution and integrated, local service provision can expand the focus of local government by better allocating limited resources to new priorities, reducing redundancies and highlighting unheralded possibilities.

# To conclude



This little book has outlined the importance of governance for the future of our cities. We offer a general way to think, act and govern to achieve the transformations required for significant, local, performance improvements. We broadly explored city governance and propose that urban arrangements will need to substantially evolve and adapt.

Taking a wide view of what governance is, we outline how to think and do core governing activities 'on the ground'. It is unavoidable that arrangements are intertwined and complex. We make the case for a systems view, recognising that cities are connected to regions, the nation-state and the international context. Consequently, what we need to do is not always straightforward, requiring a 'learning journey' approach with a 'growth mindset'. We recognise the significance of thoroughly understanding particular contexts so we can appreciate the histories that bring us to the present, as well as the importance of thinking ahead and having a keener eye to the future.

Our choices about the provision of quality of life and the supporting environment in the present, and the liveability of our cities for future generations, is ours to shape like never before. There is much to do and every reason to do it. With renewed purpose, we hope this little book offers some insights to work both on the governance of our cities as well as within them. Urban governance is a significant domain of leadership that will determine how history – and those to come – judge us.



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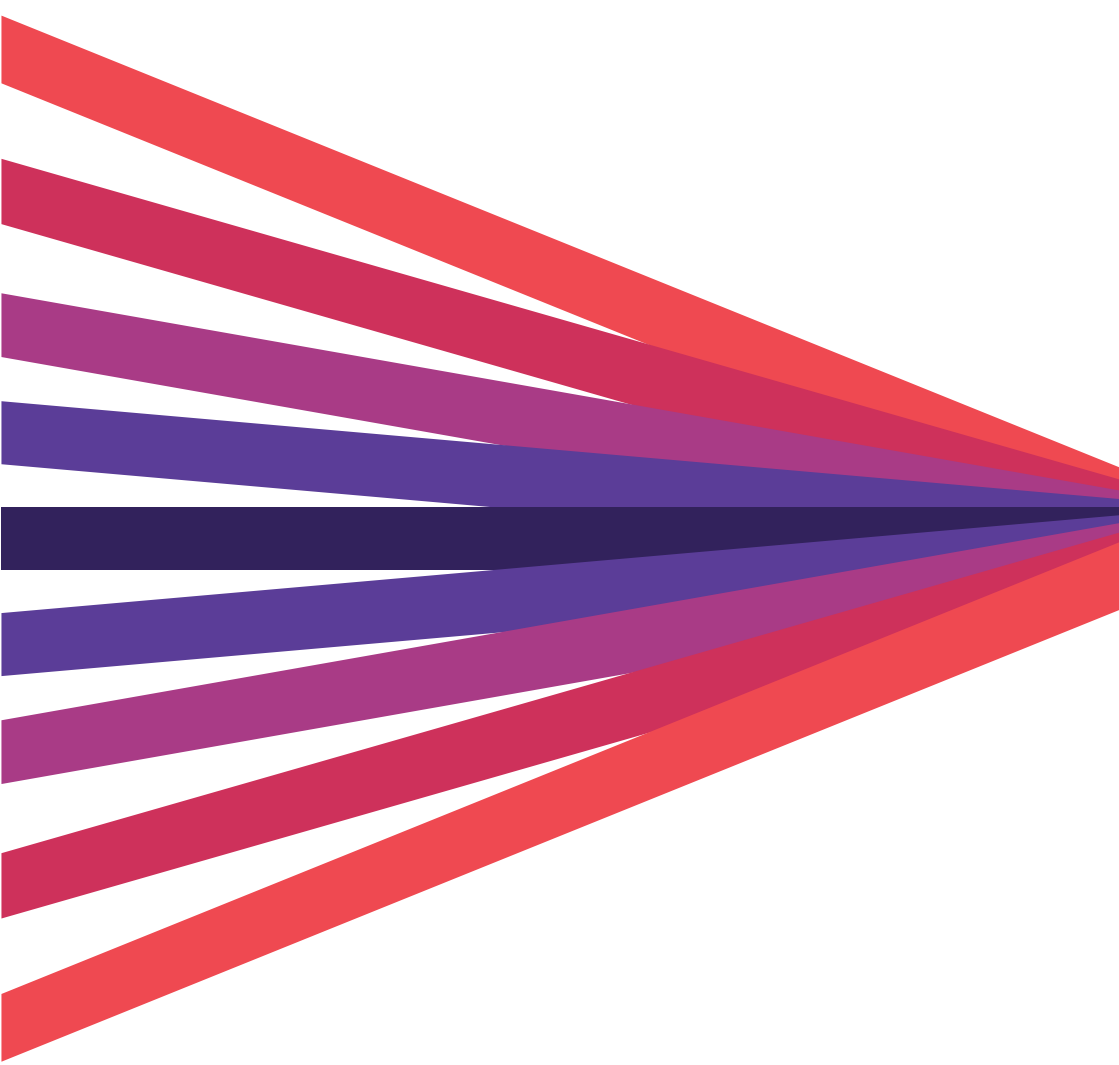
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