



House of Commons

Public Administration Select  
Committee

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# Public services: putting people first

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## Written Evidence

*This is a volume of submissions, relevant to the inquiry Putting People First, which have been reported to the House but not yet approved for publication in final form. Any public use of, or reference to, the contents should make clear that it is not yet an approved final record of the written evidence received by the Committee.*

## **Memorandum by Time Banks UK**

This submission is made on behalf of the 138 time banks that have worked in disadvantaged communities over the past ten years and successfully brought together local people, (including 'hard to reach' potential and actual users of public services), to build new social networks that enable them exercise their powers and responsibilities as citizens.

Time Banking is one of the few recent social innovations capable of providing both community empowerment and community engagement.

Our experience has clearly demonstrated that improvement in public services will require a shift in the attitudes and behaviour of local authority staff and the active involvement of those they are trying to help.

“Helping professionals must learn how to say: ‘I need what only you can do as badly as you need what I can do – programmes will continue to fail if they cannot enlist those being helped as co-producers of the outcome.’”

Dr Edgar Cahn, (Inventor of Time Banking)

Local well being, for example, cannot be delivered using one way service delivery models, particularly models that are shaped by the problems and deficiencies of individuals and communities.

Public Services will need to tap into the knowledge, skills and connections of local people and make available many more opportunities and incentives for local people to feel useful and valued.

This is a co-production approach.

In order to facilitate the growth of strong, cohesive and diverse neighbourhoods with the capacity to work in partnership with the public service providers, Public service providers will need to be helped to:

- learn to trust local people and operate in plain sight
- seek out and value contributions from a wider range of local people
- help build new social networks that they do not actually control
- be prepared to embed an element of reciprocity into their relationships with users, their families and the wider community
- accept simple and straight forward solutions like time banking

Time banking is a new mechanism for community engagement based on reciprocity and trust, incorporating all the elements of successful co-production:-

- Everyone's contribution is welcomed and valued equally – one hour of engagement earns one time credit.
- These time credits are banked and people draw on them to 'buy in' the skills of other participants as and when they need them.
- A software programme holds a local information system on the skills that local people have, when they are available and any special needs they may have.
- Time banking acts as a letter of introduction and reconnects people.  
(Give an hour or two a month to your local community through the safe framework of the time bank and your community will be there for you when you need it).
- Once in circulation a 'time based currency' takes on a meaning of its own and becomes every bit as real to people as the cash in their pockets.
- Participants soon come to understand the power of reciprocity and that 'give and take' is the basic building block of positive relationships and local well being.

If taken to scale and resourced adequately the social networks that are created through time banking offer the best chance of sustaining a local infrastructure for people to pool their efforts and work together with their public services on solving broader issues of mutual concern.

This is what we believe must be the intention behind the Select Committee Inquiry and goes far beyond consultations and surveys and learning customer care techniques from the business world.

### *Background Evidence*

The business world has long seen the advantages of co-production and has introduced all manner of loyalty schemes that work just like time banking.

- Cash point machines, Computer games, Petrol stations, Supermarkets, book reviews, parcel tracking, flat pack furniture, reality TV and radio phone-ins are all examples of co-productions.

*A few examples of the co-production of public services using time banking*

In schools conflict resolution and companionship is provided by the pupils themselves who earn 'time credits' for learning the necessary skills and watching over the 'buddy bench in the playground.

In youth centres young people earn time credits for the hours they spend helping in their local community and use them to 'buy' driving lessons, trips out and entrance to concerts.

In the Health Service Doctors prescribe time banking and lonely patients befriend other lonely patients leaving the doctors free to attend to more medical matters.

Environmental clean ups and help with recycling are being delivered by time bank participants in partnership with council waste management services.

Community centres are changing to 'time centres' where people pay for events and classes with time credits that they earn helping out with other activities.

Mental health services are provided by ex patients through a network of time banks.

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