



## What does 'collective control' look like for communities?

*Are strong social connections between residents, knowledge and skills to take action and capabilities to influence public agencies the key ingredients needed for "collective control" to develop in communities?*

These are just some of the ideas that emerged when more than 40 people came together from across the country to discuss what 'collective control' might look like in practice, as well as how it might be facilitated or undermined through policies and programmes.



The public event in Salford was organised by researchers from the NIHR School for Public Health Research [Communities in Control study](#). It was held as part of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Festival of Social Science in November 2016.

### *Sharing understandings of collective control*

Participants brought a wide range of experiences – as those who are delivering programmes that help communities to take control, as participants in such initiatives, as funders of these initiatives or as researchers interested in evaluating the impact of such initiatives. Panel members included Jennie Popay (Lancaster University), John Hume (People's Health Trust), Sonia Bussu (Local Trust), Gerry Stone (St. Sebastian's Community Centre), Daniel Button (New Economics Foundation) and Katie Powell (University of Sheffield).

### *Reflecting on collective control*

Following some brief reflections from the panel, workshop participants sat around



tables and shared their thoughts on what ‘collective control’ meant in their neighbourhoods. Key points were captured in writing on paper tablecloths. Everyone then moved around the room and responded to the notes from other tables. There was lively debate with participants commenting that they had started to think differently.

### *Collective control in practice*

Participants came up with a range of ideas about what ‘collective control’ looks like in practice. For example, they suggested:

- Collective control happens “when people say it does” – when people believe their efforts are making a difference. They must be able to make a connection between their own actions and what happens.
- Local people must be part of the conversation about the area where they live – about how life should be lived around here - even if it is other people, whether councillors, landlords or others – that make the final decision about how this is achieved.
- Collective control should be bigger than the people involved at any one time – it should be okay for people to dip in and out, because it should be about the neighbourhood and the processes and structures in place to support collective control.



A number of factors that were thought to facilitate or undermine the efforts of local people to take control of local issues were also identified:

- Local residents should not be expected to take over where the state has withdrawn support – for example, by

running local services that have had their government funding cut.

- The stigmatisation of local neighbourhoods can undermine residents' confidence to take control over local issues.

On a more positive note:

- Communities must have something in common that brings them together - a shared interest or identity, or a 'burning issue' that needs to be addressed.
- Communities need an asset-base to facilitate control attempts. Assets include the skills and experience of local residents as well as physical spaces for them to get together.
- Groups of local residents must act as connectors for other local residents - and for partner organisations - who may not all share the same aspirations, or ideas for achieving them. They must be inclusive and seek to involve those with the most to gain from greater control over a particular issue.
- Not every attempt at collective control will be viewed by those taking part as successful. When attempts to take control fail, people must be helped to move on to the next project without losing morale.
- National and local government must create the space for communities to take collective control. Communities need to be connected with and supported by properly-funded public services that respect and value the wisdom of local people.



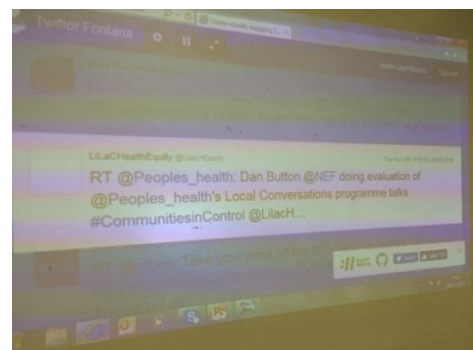
### *Helping communities work together to bring about positive change*

At the end of the day, there were a lot of shared values and understandings of what collective control looks like and how it is experienced.

Lois Orton, Senior Research Fellow in Public Health and Policy, University of Liverpool, who chaired the event, said: "Today has been a fantastic opportunity to share experiences and understandings. We all came with our own ideas of what 'collective control' might mean, but have come out with a shared understanding of how communities can be helped to work together to bring about change in their neighbourhoods. We hope this is just the beginning of a discussion that will go on to continue to grow in momentum."

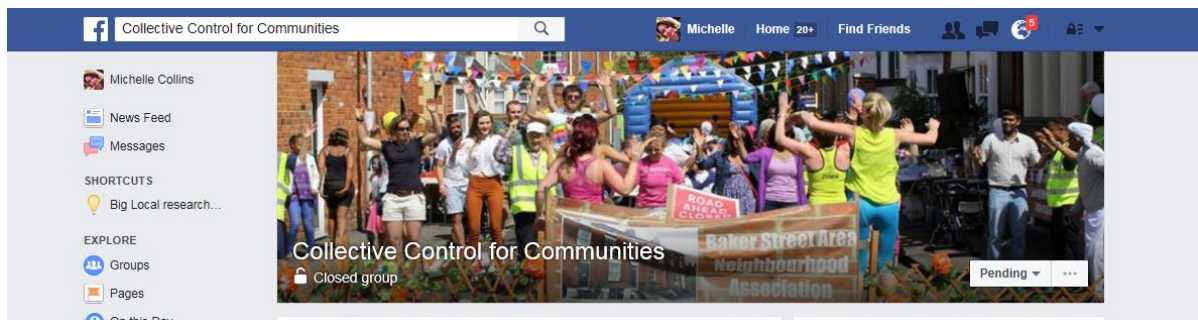
### *Twitter*

Throughout the workshop, those attending were encouraged to tweet – sharing key messages as



they emerged and taking the conversation outside of the room to a wider audience. You can follow what happened here: **#CommunitiesInControl**

### Facebook



A Facebook group has been set up to provide a neutral space for any group or individual interested in voicing practice and ideas around collective control.

The group can be accessed at:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/collectivecontrolforcommunities/> and is managed by People's Health Trust.