

Side by side and Implications for Public Services





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CoSA paper no. 3

The Council on Social Action was set up by the Prime Minister. It brings together innovators from every sector to generate ideas and initiatives through which government and other key stakeholders can catalyse, develop and celebrate social action. We consider “social action” to include the wide range of ways in which individuals, communities, organisations and businesses can seek through their choices, actions and commitments to address the social issues they care about.

The Prime Minister encouraged us to be bold. We have tried to learn from what has worked in the past and from what has not, but not to be burdened by old certainties. Sustained progress depends on a positive response from those to whom our recommendations are directly addressed and from those who influence opinion, particularly in the media. We challenge you, as we are challenging ourselves, to be open-minded and to be bold.

CoSA has a small support team equivalent to two full-time posts and 14 members – all extraordinary people with lots of ideas but very busy diaries. We are thus especially grateful to the senior civil servants, the many practitioners and to the corporate, public and third sector partners who have contributed generously and enthusiastically to the development of our thinking and to the swift progress of our practical collaborations in our first year.

This report is the work of the Council on Social Action, and as such it makes recommendations to government and to others in its capacity as an advisory body, independent of government. It is not a government document or a statement of government policy.

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Side by side and Implications for Public Services

“What’s really distressing, of course, is that though my sister is surrounded by people spouting the ‘rhetoric of care’ no one actually seems to give a damn about her personally. And the care seems to be restricted to feeding her and housing her and giving her pills and making sure that she is not too much of a nuisance to the carers, whose ‘real work’ is getting their reports and strategies ready for the next meeting they have to attend and in which they will have to do their ‘rhetoric of care’ as plausibly as possible.”

Statement from the brother of a disabled woman admitted to hospital following an acute attack of mental illness brought on by the death of their mother, August 2008.

The power of ‘one-to-one’ and the implications for public services

One-to-one working includes mentoring and befriending and all kinds of transformative relationships where knowledge and experience are shared with another person who is not a family member or close friend. Such relationships can unlock potential in us all, tackle need, build social capital and erode inequality. The Council on Social Action (CoSA) has focused a significant amount of its work on understanding where one-to-one work is done well and how success might be replicated. This work has witnessed in powerful ways how:

“It is not only possible for one human being to make a real and lasting difference to another, it is often the only thing that ever does.”

(CoSA 2008 p.1)

Side by Side, the CoSA paper outlining actions for developing one-to-one work, concludes that one-to-one is a route to unleashing energy, experience and compassion in every community, school, business and public agency.

CoSA has been primarily concerned with voluntary schemes but recognises that ‘one-to-one’ covers a spectrum of activity from universal school befriending schemes through to specialised staff. This paper considers the lessons which can be learnt from our work at the voluntary end and how they might be applied to the ways in which public services are planned and delivered.

The traditional stereotype of public service planning is that it is top-down, hierarchical, focused on inputs and involves a relationship between users and deliverers that is deferential and controlled by the professional. The reality is of course not so stark, not just because of reforms driven by new public management and more recently the personalisation agenda, but also because many of the people delivering public services are drawn to this service instinctively because of their

Many of the people delivering public services are drawn to this service instinctively because of their desire to establish the types of relationships where a real and lasting difference is achieved.

What is it about one-to-one working that makes this such a powerful approach for achieving change? What are the implications of this for the way we plan and deliver public services?

desire to establish the types of relationships where a real and lasting difference is achieved. The best teachers, the best GPs, the best social workers do these jobs because they want to transform the lives of the people with whom they work and they seek to work in ways that achieve this.

However, this paper's opening quotation illustrates that there is a part of current reality that does not live up to what we all want from public services. The public service reform agenda is a vast one, generating a huge amount of policy and practice interest. Within this crowded territory, CoSA has sought to ask: what is it about one-to-one working that makes this such a powerful approach for achieving change? What are the implications of this for the way we plan and deliver public services? How might public services change in order to move closer to this? What is the impact on voluntary organisations delivering public services under government contract?

CoSA's discussions this year with the government's Strategy Unit have explored how new work on the role of one-to-one in public services might develop. New approaches to public management, such as the personalisation agenda, seem to offer some potential, but the current practice, even in its most radical form, still lacks the real focus on productive, personal, human relationships through which services can achieve the greatest benefit.

What are the features that make one-to-one relationships good at transforming people's lives?

Our work so far on one-to-one has observed how the process of one person supporting another is immensely powerful. The features that make these relationships so transformative are:

- The human interaction; someone to talk to, someone to listen to;
- The sense of feeling special and valued when people give their time to one another;
- The opportunity to establish a relationship over the long term; where the relationship is a good one, being able to keep seeing the same person week after week, enjoying the continuity this offers and the opportunity to build trust and confidence.
- The opportunity to consider with someone what resources you have and how best to use them; resources may be very widely defined and include experience (taught and shared), the power to make decisions, energy, compassion, talent, ambition, aspiration and in some cases money;
- The way that each person gets something of value from the relationship that helps them to move on in substantive terms; a new feeling of self-worth, new experience, new skills, new networks; The opportunities that this approach generates to push and to challenge people to change or progress.

The wider results are valuable social capital, generated and distributed via these new connections between people; social capital both in the sense that these relationships help people to 'get by' through having positive contact with others, but also in the sense of helping people to

‘get ahead’ through learning new skills, building confidence and making new contacts.

So working in this way should not be seen either as a rather too informal to be taken seriously, or as some sort of luxury that sits well behind the serious work of tackling society’s evils. One-to-one helps people to develop new resources and opportunities for tackling exclusion and to increase the sense of control people have over their lives. It has the power to boost confidence and to help people make their voices heard. At its root, this work is about tackling inequality: firstly, through the outcomes that it helps to bring about; and secondly through the process of two people striking a new relationship which may cut across economic groups, genders and ethnicities. Ruth Lister writes that “inequality distorts our lives, our society and our relationships with each other.” (Lister 2008) Work that establishes new, positive human relationships is central to undermining the inequality that distorts us.

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How does the way one-to-one relationships are organised contribute to their success?

We have also seen that across many different types of one-to-one work, there are some common features in the way that the relationship is organised that contribute to making this work effective:

- The role of early intervention and prevention – although some may be encouraged into one-to-one work as a result of a crisis, as a strategy it is likely to be adopted as a way of helping someone away from a set of circumstance that may result in much worse crisis later down the line. A feature is being able to identify and engage people for whom this type of approach may be beneficial.
- The role of goal setting and a time frame – this may not involve extensive formal targets, but setting incremental goals is effective as part of making a clear statement of what is trying to be achieved. Keeping records of achievement and performance can also reinforce success. Framing activity around aspirations rather than problems is immediately more exciting and inspiring.
- The role of administration – although record keeping is important, successful one-to-one work appears to keep administration to a minimum.
- The potential role of technology – in the main, the value of one-to-one is in face-to-face interactions. However there are a set of issues which people may not initially want to share with people around them, for example, personal health problems or where someone is anxious they may be doing something wrong such as over claiming welfare benefits. Technology can provide an alternative for people who would like anonymity and intimacy. The face-to-face mentor can do some things that the technology can never facilitate but the opposite is also true.
- The small scale, diversity and individuality of these projects – this is a great strength, but also a weakness. It means wheels are re-invented and the low profile means public sector commissioners and independent funders can overlook the value of working one-to-one.

How do we support the very best public sector staff who already work in this way and establish this way of working as an ‘operating logic’¹ for public services as a whole?

The one-to-one projects that we have looked at so far have all been voluntary, involving no payment on either side. It has been about somebody taking a ‘special interest.’ How could the spirit and outcome of these relationships be adopted on a wide scale across public services?

What implications might these conclusions have for the way we deliver public services?

The best public sector staff work in ways that reflect some of the features described above. But it is not unfair to say that many find it difficult, and perhaps increasingly difficult, to work like this. There are new examples of good practice such as individual learning mentors or specialist nurses but why should we not make it possible for any user of public services, from a school child to an ex-offender to believe that the person supporting them is taking a ‘special interest’ in them? How do we support the very best public sector staff who already work in this way and establish this way of working as an ‘operating logic’¹ for public services as a whole?

How do we design and deliver public services now?

The Government’s Strategy Unit compared three approaches to public service management in its 2002 paper ‘Creating Public Value: an analytical framework for public service reform.’ (Kelly *et al* 2002) The first, traditional view sees public service as defined by politicians and experts, being about managing inputs and good administration, with accountability upwards to departments and to ministers, delivered by hierarchy to users who should be deferential. The second, defined as new public management has a focus on customers; it is about inputs and outputs managed for efficiency, with accountability to politicians and users through market comparison and contracts. The third, defined as public value, describes a dialogue between providers, funders and users. It is about multiple agreements agreed with stakeholders, with accountability directly to tax payers and politicians. It is delivered through a mixed model of providers depending on user need where users are co-producers of services, creating solutions with professionals.

This third approach has been developed in the 2008 government paper ‘Excellence and Fairness: achieving world class public services’ which sets putting citizens in control as the priority. It argues that

“the best (public service) systems in the world treat each citizen as a unique individual...and then tailor the service to meet these personalised requirements.”

(Cabinet Office 2008, p.17)

In reality, elements of all three of these approaches are currently present in public service delivery. Under the public value approach, or what is now called the personalisation agenda, public services are being reconfigured to incorporate bespoke support from professionals like expert nurses and classroom mentors. Departments are exploring the implications for their work. The Department of Health (DoH) writes that:

“across government, the shared ambition is to put people first through a radical reform of public services... Personalisation, including a strategic

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1 A phrase used by Charles Leadbetter in Leadbetter (2004)

shift towards early intervention and prevention, will be the cornerstone of public services.”

DoH website, August 2008

Does personalisation offer the means to achieve what we want out of the relationships between public servants and users? Charles Leadbetter in his pamphlet ‘Personalisation through participation’ argues that:

“Personalisation is a very potent but highly contested and ambiguous idea that could be as influential as privatisation was in the 1980s and 1990s in reshaping public provision.”

(Leadbetter 2004, p.18)

What does it mean? Personalisation in the private sector means offering increased user choice, for example, by enabling a customer to choose the specification for a new car or a mobile phone. The aim is to make products more relevant and suited to customers’ individual needs and expectations. The internet site Amazon.com, which generates individualised recommendations for customers, is an example where web-based technologies can extend the principle.

In the public sector, personalisation has encouraged a focus on choice which is developed partly through opening up markets to competition. However, it is also about arguing for user empowerment with users being involved in the shaping and co-production of services. It pushes for greater user control with increased accountability to the people who use services. Initiatives include Direct Payments where disabled people who need support services are given the cash to purchase the services they want, and offered external support to do this.

As such, the ensuing debate in relation to public services is about the extent to which **access** and **uptake** is improved and how much **say** users have. At one end of the spectrum, this could mean that personalisation is all about call centres offering 24 hour a day access to information, or being able to get an appointment at the GP surgery within 24 hours. At the other end, this could mean giving users of services greater freedom and capacity to self-manage and self-organise.

Leadbetter sets out five stages of personalisation:

- 1) having a more customer friendly interface;
- 2) giving users more say in navigating their way through services;
- 3) giving users more direct say over how money is spent;
- 4) seeing users not as consumers but co-designers and co-producers of services participating in service design and provision;
- 5) pushing self organisation with public good emerging from within society through mass social innovation addressing the big social challenges.

As stage one moves to stage five, Leadbetter argues that the approach becomes more radical and disruptive.

Leadbetter defines the challenge as not just how do we create more personalised versions of existing public services but how do more personalised public services help people to devise their own, bottom-up solutions which create public good. His answer is to focus on the role

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of participation, where users of services are given time to articulate the intricacy of their needs and enough real choice to voice their aspirations. This makes people active, informed and increasingly articulate participants in this process.

All this is positive and the enthusiastic way in which departments like the Department of Health have taken on the agenda is encouraging. However, personalisation still does not seem to mean a focus on the quality of the human relationship between the person delivering public services and the person using public services. So arrangements, as they have been developing, may not be a full enough response when considering the implications of our findings about one-to-one in relation to the delivery of public services. These developments are even potentially confusing. If personalisation stretches no further than being about call centres, this risks going in the **opposite** direction from the one we think is beneficial.

A focus on personalisation as being about the actual relationship between the public sector and individual citizens is what the conclusions of our work on one-to-one suggest is worth exploring. There needs to be more emphasis on the role of strong and supportive individual relationships. Rather than personalisation, perhaps the conclusion is that we need the humanisation of public services.

This is echoed in a recent report of a project funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation called 'Standards We Expect.' This asked disabled people what personalisation or 'person-centred support' really means to them. As well as being about choice and control, a major factor is the importance of relationships:

"Then the greatest thing that happens is you get this empathy and when that happens there just seems to be a natural progression,...that greater understanding because although there needs to be the education side of it, it seems to fall more into place once you share it with somebody who knows what you are talking about."

(Face-to-face worker quoted in Glynn and Beresford 2008, p. 22)

This has also appeared as a theme in the 2008 Cabinet Office paper 'Excellence and Fairness' which states that:

"stronger one-to-one relationships should become the norm."

(Cabinet Office 2008, p.23)

This is the potential contribution from CoSA's work: a focus on creating the conditions for these one-to-one human relationships to become the norm. Rather than **personalisation**, and the risk that this set of practices ends up going no further than making services just more **consumer friendly**, we should be talking about **humanisation**. In order to organise and administer public services accordingly, a set of values, attitudes and behaviours is required, backed up by a range of resources that gives primacy to the moment when two people work together to generate the best, most transformative outcome. Surely this is the most radical and disruptive innovation: to turn the planning, delivery and evaluation of public services absolutely on their head so they focus on the quality of the one-to-one relationship at the point where public resources are used by people who need them.

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The Prime Minister Gordon Brown captured why this is important when he said:

“For every child in care, the young family stretched to breaking point, the elderly neighbour alone, strength and hope and friendship come not from markets and states or incentives and commands but from the human touch”

Brown (2007) p.71

All effort should be directed to putting this human interaction at the centre. At present it is at the end, loaded with the pressure of targets and administration, time and budgets. This puts the relationship under such strain that the only outcome is the frustration, resentment and poor service of the sort experienced by the man quoted at the beginning of this paper. CoSA heard from of Royal Mail’s collaboration with Barnados who’s children wanted more than anything a relationship with an adult worker where they were “not just a file.”

What are the implications for public policy?

How might focusing on the quality of relationships between deliverer and user become the new organising logic for public services? In the transfer of resources from the public realm to its citizens we need to build a one-to-one mindset; a shared recognition that this is an established, effective and mutually beneficial approach to tackling a diverse range of personal challenges and to developing individual potential that ultimately reduces inequality. Imagine taking the phrase “a society where we all have someone to turn to” and applying it across the spectrum of public services. Could we say we all think of our GP, teacher or social worker as someone we can turn to? And then could we go on to say it of prison officers, job centre advisers and probation officers? And how many of the people currently in these posts feel able to perform their roles in this way?

This approach should be deployed in the areas that make most sense. In his view of personalisation, Leadbetter suggests greatest benefits are to be had in the areas of non-emergency health care, education, social services and housing.

A significant additional area to add would be criminal justice, especially crime prevention and reducing re-offending. Within the broad category of social services, particular groups such as children in care, the long term unemployed, people claiming Incapacity Benefit, people who are homeless or in temporary accommodation would also benefit. The list is long.

In terms of applying this approach where it makes most sense, it is also worth noting that not everyone needs this depth of relationship every time they use public services. If you need emergency dental treatment, the priority is fast access and a quality service. A long term one-to-one relationship with the dentist is not a necessary requirement for generating the right outcome. If, however, your child falls seriously ill and requires long term care, with repeat visits to the hospital, detailed discussions about treatment plans and long term recovery, a one-to-one relationship with your child’s nurse or doctor becomes a crucial part of getting what you need from public services at that time, quality

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treatment certainly, but also someone to talk to, who makes you feel you are special, in whom you have trust and confidence, the opportunity to reach informed decisions together and who will work in a way that consciously aims to increase your control over the issue being faced.

There are perhaps some factors that people in these situations have in common in terms of the nature of the problems being tackled. They are long term, complex and they may involve issues about self-esteem, confidence or skills. They are all situations that would benefit from a face-to-face relationship over the long term where quality of service is dependent on direct engagement between professional and users. Where relevant, public service relationships like this also have other benefits in terms of developing social and emotional skills that support well being and employability as well as challenging traditional structures that perpetuate inequality.

A challenge is achieving continuity in a relationship when people more often work part time, or move jobs frequently, and particularly in the face of a general trend towards a greater use of call centres.

Conventional wisdom would say that a further challenge is that of measurement. There is a valid concern with measurement in terms of assessing performance, calculating value for money and making decisions about allocating resources. However we would say that working in this way generates the sorts of outcomes expected of public services already – improved skills, reduced poverty, raised educational achievement, improved health, well-being and independence, more cohesive and active communities, safer children, less discrimination or a reduction in the harm caused by drugs and alcohol. These are all priority outcomes in the 2007 Public Service Agreements.

What are the implications for public sector staff?

Many public sector staff would feel liberated by an approach that freed them to work in these ways. It sits much more closely to the values of public service; a commitment to support the public interest, a sense of pride and duty and a dedication to equity and democratic accountability.

The 2008 Strategy Unit paper describes a process of fostering a new professionalism across the public sector workforce. For some public sector staff more comfortable in the traditional model described above, this would require re-thinking their role. This would move them from patriarchy and hierarchy to facilitator, where their role is not to provide solutions directly, but to help clients find the best way to solve their problems themselves. It also requires skills in identifying and engaging people for whom this approach may be beneficial. This is more straightforward where individuals have many moments when they interact with public services: children attending school, an older person regularly visiting the GP. But a risk is that if we rely on these moments to identify people, those furthest from services, for example someone vulnerable and alone at home, would be missed. It requires some more imaginative approaches. For example, a Housing department faced with a tenant getting into rent arrears would do more than send a curt reminder letter, and instead proactively offer to explore options for additional help.

This may involve much greater freedom to be flexible or to use discretion although the distinction between the two is important. A past debate

in public services was the role of ‘flexibility’ in delivering mainstream services. This came to be associated with bending the rules. As such the attempt to find ways of being flexible focused on the design of systems and procedures. It also means that flexibility has to be **built into** the system, yet trying to **formalise flexibility** gives rise to something of a contradiction. Discretion, however, places more emphasis on the role of the individual operating the system, enabling them to deliver resources in response to local circumstances and on the basis of professional judgement and intimate consultation with the person they are there to support.

This may also involve a new approach to training, particularly in communication skills. These skills would centre on approaches that are driven by an interest in forming and sustaining the sort of individual human relationships that are at the heart of successful and happy lives.

We could also explore more deeply the role of volunteers within public services as one way to humanise the experience; for example schemes such as hospital or prison visitors or carers’ support. This is attractive as it offers many benefits for volunteers and for those being visited or supported. It is also cost effective, benefiting from the free energy of volunteers. Another route is to expand the role that peer support could play such as patient participation groups or residents’ associations.

There is certainly a role for these approaches, but we do not believe that they are the whole solution. They are not enough. It is too much to put the responsibility for humanising public services on to users and volunteers. It risks being just a sticking plaster. Relying on this approach means services will not be designed in fundamentally different ways where the whole system, not just small parts of it, centres on humanisation. Putting faith in volunteer schemes does not necessitate a radical (in its real sense of going right to the root of the problem) re-think of how services are designed so that targets and administrative systems are designed with the quality of the human interaction on the front-line in the front of planners’ minds. Increasing peer support does not make front-line staff genuinely examine their own practice so they move from one of exerting power over users of services to one of genuinely asking “what can I, as the human face of the public sector, do today, right now to improve this person’s life?”

Discretion places more emphasis on the role of the individual operating the system, enabling them to deliver resources in response to local circumstances and on the basis of professional judgement and intimate consultation with the person they are there to support.

What are the implications for voluntary organisations delivering public services under contract to government?

A particular route for CoSA to develop these ideas is in examining the impact on the role of voluntary organisations delivering public services under contract to government. Many of the issues touched on above such as the challenge of measurement, the value of volunteers or the role of user-led services are areas where the voluntary sector has expertise to offer.

However, CoSA believes that a particular priority for developing this work is in examining how the apparatus and practices of **contracting** have an impact on voluntary agencies capacity to work in ways that reflect our findings on one-to-one. Shankari Chandran, Pro Bono and Community Affairs Senior Manager at City law firm Allen & Overy and a member

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of CoSA, was intrigued by this and helped us to apply it to her area of interest and expertise, civil legal aid advice services. It offers a useful area in which to test how these findings might relate to practice.

Legal aid helps ensure access to justice by providing high quality advice, information and representation to people who would not otherwise be able to afford it. The relationship between adviser and client reflects very closely the features of one-to-one relationships as set out above.

To recap:

- The human interaction; someone to talk to, someone to listen to;
- The sense of feeling special and valued;
- The opportunity to establish a relationship over the long term building up trust and confidence;
- The opportunity to consider with someone what resources you have and how best to use them;
- The way that each person gets something of value from the relationship that helps them to move on in substantive terms; a new feeling of self-worth, new experience, new skills, new networks;
- The opportunities that this approach generates to push and to challenge people to change or progress.

As discussed, not every person coming for advice needs or wants this depth of support. But at the moments of crisis where people are at their most vulnerable, these are certainly the features of the relationship that are evident in the work of the advice workers across the voluntary sector.

The arrangements government puts in place for purchasing advice services have an important influence over the ability of organisations to work in these ways. Focusing on the area of civil legal aid advice, CoSA would like over the coming months to assess the ways in which current practice delivers against the criteria of productive one-to-one relationships and identify ways in which the funding and administration of social welfare legal aid might be improved in order to achieve the most productive relationships between advisers and clients. This will require detailed work on how the public sector and the voluntary sector combine to generate transformative outcomes. It will have to explore issues concerning the measurement of outcomes and on how to reflect particularly valuable ways of working in contract specifications and agreements. If this approach proves useful here then it could have a lot to teach other areas.

Conclusion

Personalisation and the huge debates on public service reform are much wider than the areas focused on in this paper. However, we think this brief reflection on CoSA's work on one-to-one working makes two principal contributions to the debate:

Firstly, the personalisation agenda appears to offer some potential as a means for making public services reflect good practice in one-to-one working. However, the term personalisation has come to mean too many things. If, at one end of the spectrum, this is simply about customising services, then it is of value to certain public service transactions, but it is also in fact the opposite of what we think is needed for the most

vulnerable users of public services where the most transformative outcomes are urgently needed. For these, particularly in early intervention, prevention and areas where someone is likely to interact with public services over the long term, rather than personalisation we think that what we need is humanisation. This is more than just public services with a kind face. It is about a radical re-think in the way that public services are designed. Instead of starting from the centre and working out to the front-line, design should start at the point where public services are delivered, and do everything it can to make this relationship as productive as possible. And this means making it as human as possible. We think that the best public servants, who already strive but struggle to work in this way, would find efforts to address this extremely welcome.

Secondly, we think that analysing the design and delivery of services in this way would offer tremendous potential for addressing issues facing voluntary sector providers working under contract to government. A phrase often used in this debate is that we should not just be **transferring** public services, but **transforming** them. A major anxiety in voluntary organisations is that “contracting” makes it increasingly difficult to work in the transformative one-to-one way that they have been successfully working for many years. CoSA has proposed a pilot project to examine how good practice in one-to-one working is applied in the area of civil legal aid. We hope very much to be able to develop this along with partners in government, the private sector and the voluntary sector. The prize is great – public services that genuinely transform people’s lives.

This is more than just public services with a kind face. It is about a radical re-think in the way that public services are designed. Instead of starting from the centre and working out to the front-line, design should start at the point where public services are delivered.

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Council on Social Action Papers

The Council on Social Action has produced a series of papers setting out the CoSA programme.

CoSA Paper No. 1, Willing Citizens

CoSA Paper No. 2, Side by side: a report setting out the Council on Social Action's work on one-to-one

CoSA Paper No. 3, Side by side and Implications for Public Services

CoSA Paper No. 4, Collaborative Commitments, written by Prof David Grayson, Doughty Centre for Corporate Responsibility on behalf of CoSA

CoSA Paper No. 5, Council on Social Action: Commentary on Year One

All the CoSA papers are available for download from the CoSA website:
www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/social_action.aspx

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