NARRATIVES AND EVIDENCE IN PUBLIC SERVICE REFORM: EXPLAINING CHANGES TO THE GOVERNANCE OF FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES

Dr Pete Eckersley
Katarzyna Lakoma
Nottingham Trent University
@peckersley
@KatarzynaLakoma
OVERVIEW OF PRESENTATION

- Introduction
- Evidence and narratives as tools for achieving change
- Research questions
- The case of P(F)CCs in England
- Conclusions
THE DIFFICULTIES OF IMPLEMENTING ORGANISATIONAL AND POLICY CHANGE

Organisational change - change in formal structure, organizational culture, and goals, program, or mission (DiMaggio and Powell 1991).

Organisations and individuals are trapped in ‘iron cages’ of bureaucratic rationality (Weber 1905; Ashworth et al 2007).

Policy change is also difficult, because previous initiatives create powerful client groups that benefit from existing arrangements and can ‘lock-in’ decision-makers (March and Olsen 1989; Pierson 2000).

Yet policy change does happen sometimes, and scholars have developed numerous theories to try and explain it (Weible and Sabatier 2018).

Which factors contributed towards change in our study? What strategies did key actors adopt to try and introduce their preferred policies?
EVIDENCE-BASED POLICYMAKING (EBPM)

Role of EBPM: to keep politicians and policymakers honest by holding them to high standards of evidence and reason (The Reinforce school; French 2019)

The main factors affecting use of evidence: availability and access to information, costs, timing and opportunity, policymaker research skills, good relationships between researchers and research users (Oliver et al., 2014; Cairney 2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comprehensive rationality</th>
<th>Bounded rationality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An objective and comprehensive account of the relevant evidence</td>
<td>The evidence is contested; scientific evidence is one of many sources of information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The policy process is centralised and power is held by a small number of policymakers</td>
<td>The policy process contains a large number of influential actors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policymakers understand the evidence in the same way as scientists</td>
<td>Policymakers base their decisions on a mixture of emotions, knowledge, and shortcuts to gather relevant evidence.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comprehensive rationality vs bounded rationality (Cairney 2016)
Narrative refers to a discourse form in which events and happenings are configured into a temporal unity by means of a plot (Polkinghorne, 1995: 5). Narratives are especially likely to be of significance during times of strategic change (Dunford and Jones 2000). Language is heavily impacted in this process.

Narratives are powerful mechanisms for confirming actors’ perceptions - they can create ‘information shortcuts’ or heuristics that support existing worldviews (Crow and Jones 2018)

Narratives may exhibit only tenuous links with objective reality (Llewellyn 2001), and often involve the construction of a separate reality that simplifies the real-world situation. But they can have substantial power to influence and shape future developments (Weiss 2018).
NARRATIVE POLICY FRAMEWORK

DISSECTS NARRATIVES TO ALLOW US TO ALLOCATE DIFFERENT ROLES TO PHENOMENA, INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANISATIONS WITHIN THE POLICYMAKING PROCESS AND THEN ANALYSE THEM INDIVIDUALLY.

Narrative Policy Framework

- Setting – the basic conditions and assumptions
- Characters – villains, victims and heroes
- Plot – sets out relationships between the characters and causal links
- Moral – this story shows why we need to adopt this policy

Jones and McBeth 2010
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What is the evidence used to support changes to the governance of fire and rescue services?

What are the dominant policy narratives used to support these changes?
(a) What are the supporting change narratives?
(b) What are the opposing change narratives?

Why and how do policymakers seek to deploy these narratives?

What does this tell us about the role of politics in policymaking?
The Case of P(F)CCS

Since 2017, Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) have been able to make a case to assume responsibility for the governance of fire and rescue services within their force areas and become Police, Fire and Crime Commissioners (PFCCs).

The 2017 Act requires an assessment (i.e. a business case submitted and approved by the Home Secretary) of why this reform

(i) is in the interests of economy, efficiency and effectiveness, or
(ii) is in the interests of public safety.
METHODS

7 business cases (Essex, Northamptonshire, West Mercia, North Yorkshire, Cambridgeshire & Peterborough, Staffordshire and Hertfordshire)

*Ex post* inductive coding exercise of publicly-available documentation
  - the business cases,
  - results of public consultations,
  - independent analyses by the CIPFA,
  - local media reports,
  - the minutes of local council and Fire and Rescue Authority meetings.
## CONSULTATION RESPONSES I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Force area</th>
<th>Residents</th>
<th>Elected reps</th>
<th>FRS staff</th>
<th>Police staff</th>
<th>Councils</th>
<th>Residents</th>
<th>Elected reps</th>
<th>FRS staff</th>
<th>Police staff</th>
<th>Councils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northants</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td></td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Mercia</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cambs</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herts</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Consultations to seek approval for PCC decision to opt for Governance model: i.e. no other options presented
## CONSULTATION RESPONSES II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essex</th>
<th>1 – no benefit</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5 – significant benefit</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Representation</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>14%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Governance</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single employer</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essex</th>
<th>Elected reps</th>
<th>FRS staff</th>
<th>Police staff</th>
<th>Residents</th>
<th>Public/VCS</th>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>Online</th>
<th>Residents</th>
<th>FRS staff</th>
<th>Police staff</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No change</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representation</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<td>27%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>29%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Governance</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>23%</td>
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<td>22%</td>
<td>48%</td>
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<td>59%</td>
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<td>55%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Single employer</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>28%</td>
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<td>17%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region</td>
<td>In favour</td>
<td>Opposed</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Cambridgeshire & Peterborough | 1 Conservative-controlled district council  
3 Conservative MPs  
1 Conservative combined authority mayor | Cambridgeshire CC (Conservative-controlled)  
Peterborough Council (Conservative-controlled)  
1 then-Conservative MP (who now sits with Change UK)  
Cambridgeshire & Peterborough FRS |
| Essex                   | Essex CC (Conservative-controlled)  
Southend Council (Conservative-controlled)  
Thurrock Council (No overall control)  
2 Conservative-controlled district councils  
17 Conservative MPs | Hertfordshire CC (Conservative-controlled)  
2 Conservative-controlled district councils  
1 Liberal Democrat-controlled district council |
| Hertfordshire           | 1 Conservative-controlled district council  
11 Conservative MPs | North Yorkshire CC (Conservative-controlled)  
City of York Council (no overall control)  
5 Conservative-controlled district councils  
2 district councils with no overall control  
North Yorkshire FRS |
| North Yorkshire         | 1 Conservative-controlled district council | Staffordshire CC (Conservative-controlled)  
Stoke-on-Trent Council (no overall control)  
2 Labour-controlled district councils  
1 district council with no overall control  
2 Labour MPs  
Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent FRS |
| Northamptonshire        | 3 Conservative-controlled district councils  
4 Conservative MPs | Northamptonshire FRS  
1 Labour-controlled district council |
| Staffordshire           | 2 Conservative-controlled district councils  
6 Conservative MPs | Staffordshire CC (Conservative-controlled)  
Shropshire Council (Conservative-controlled)  
2 Conservative-controlled district councils  
2 Labour-controlled district councils  
1 district council with no overall control  
Shropshire FRS |
| West Mercia             | | Worcestershire CC (Conservative-controlled)  
Herefordshire Council (Conservative-controlled)  
Shropshire Council (Conservative-controlled)  
2 Conservative-controlled district councils  
2 Labour-controlled district councils  
1 district council with no overall control  
Hereford and Worcester FRS  
Shropshire FRS |
CURRENT STATE OF PLAY

Two PFCCs approved without much controversy (Essex and Northamptonshire). In both cases there were clear local problems that needed to be addressed

Two PFCCs approved in the teeth of local opposition (Staffordshire and North Yorkshire)

Two PCCs got the Home Office’s approval after judicial reviews (Cambridgeshire & Peterborough and West Mercia)

CIPFA reviews of business cases were inconclusive: due to a lack of robust evidence, they neither corroborated the arguments for reform nor dismissed them

Hertfordshire PCC abandoned his proposal (along with seven other PCCs who considered change)
So, given that there was substantial opposition to change in some areas, how did PFCCs try to convince other actors to support their reform proposals?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Finance</th>
<th>Democracy</th>
<th>Performance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Savings&quot; narrative (supportive)</td>
<td>&quot;Accountability&quot; narrative (supportive)</td>
<td>&quot;Collaboration&quot; narrative (supportive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Cuts&quot; narrative (opposed)</td>
<td>&quot;Power grab&quot; narrative (opposed)</td>
<td>&quot;Ain't broke&quot; narrative (opposed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
<td>Insufficient resources</td>
<td>Lack of scrutiny and accountability</td>
<td>PCC wants more power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villains</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>Central govt</td>
<td>PCC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victims</td>
<td>The public</td>
<td>The public</td>
<td>PCC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heroes</td>
<td>PCC</td>
<td>Front-line public servants</td>
<td>None: there is no problem to fix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plot</td>
<td>Governance model will save money</td>
<td>Better funded public services</td>
<td>Governance model will improve joint working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral</td>
<td>PFCC</td>
<td>Trust your public servants</td>
<td>There are more important issues facing fire and police services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“There would be direct benefits from adopting this [governance] option realised through accelerating estate consolidation opportunities” (PCC for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough)

“I would suggest that democracy and accountability is improved by having a directly elected Fire Commissioner rather than appointed local councillors acting as an FRA.” (PCC for West Mercia)

“The change to single governance will enable new ways of working that will benefit our communities and our emergency services alike.” (PCC for West Mercia)

“More opportunities for early intervention and prevention work. Greater value coming from quicker and easier sharing of information.” (Northants)
“I am deeply concerned about the proposals for ‘estate rationalisation’. This clearly indicates the closure of local police stations and locating the services in Fire Stations.” (Councillor, Staffs)

“Both need more money. No need to work together” (West Mercia)

“Services provided by the Fire Brigade have been operating effectively. Therefore why risk this?” (Cambs)

“The Commissioner’s Local Business Case does not make a compelling argument as to why it is necessary to adopt the Governance Model to address the stated shortcomings in the pace and scope of collaboration between the Police and the Fire and Rescue Service.” (Member of the public, North Yorks)

“The two work together at the moment and if something is not broken why change.” (Northants)
Narratives were often much more powerful than ‘evidence’ in shaping decision-making - and easier to deploy to win arguments.

Narratives are more about *politics*, evidence is more about *policy*.

We found that elected representatives can exercise significant influence over policymaking. This may be particularly relevant to smaller policy subsystems.

Policymaking is not a purely technocratic exercise. This could mean the resulting policy is badly designed and difficult to implement, because it may be based on a simplified version of reality. But is it a more democratic way of deciding what government does?
THANK YOU

peter.eckersley@ntu.ac.uk
katarzyna.lakoma@ntu.ac.uk