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Learning to Manage Public Service Organizations Better: A Scenario for Teaching Public Administration

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Abstract

In the context of public value, it is argued that there is a need to adopt the learning organization philosophy to manage public service organizations better. For collaborative work with public sector managers or in management education, a fictitious scenario is presented to develop the concept of the learning organization as paradox. Faced with multiple and conflicting demands, public managers find it difficult to change organizational behaviour in response to new knowledge. The scenario demonstrates *how* learning organization philosophy can be used to translate new knowledge into new behaviours. Key skills required for public managers to exploit the knowledge of all organizational members and confront the challenges of a contested concept, such as public value, are developed and comprise: summarizing evidence; making judgements, sharing thought processes on a contentious issue, and arriving at a consensus together. Contributions to public administration theory and practice are discussed.

Keywords

Learning organization, public service organizations, public managers, scenario, mutual learning, shared vision, strategy, decision-making, public services.

Introduction

“...there are concepts which are essentially contested, concepts the proper use of which inevitably involves endless disputes about their proper uses on the part of their users” (Gallie, 1955, p. 169).

Public value is a contested concept (Hartley et al., 2017) and as such public service organizations charged with the creation and delivery of public value are much more exposed to external demands than their private sector counterparts (Hodgkinson et al., 2017). Specifically, with the increasing complexity of service delivery in times of austerity, public managers are confronted with the challenge of balancing a range of conflicting demands in service provision resulting in greater demands on the strategic decision-making process (see Bryson et al., 2009; Nygaard and Bramming, 2008; Osborne et al., 2013, 2015). It is argued here that there is a need for such organizations to adapt to an increasingly uncertain environment by emphasizing learning processes for the delivery of public value. Public value is conceptualized here as value that is “created or added through the activities of public organizations and their managers” (Hartley et al., 2017, p. 672). Central to achieving this is learning organization philosophy, which requires an organization to translate new knowledge into new behaviours (Hodgkinson et al., 2000).

Learning processes play a prominent role in contemporary theories of management. Research into organizational learning, including insights from the knowledge-based view of the firm, focuses on the acquisition and creation of organizational knowledge. A learning organization goes beyond this (Garvin, 1993; Garvin et al., 2008) and is defined as “an organization that facilitates the learning of all its members and continuously transforms itself and its context” (Burgoyne et al., 1991, p. 1); but “...recognising that it is not possible to achieve ‘learning organisation’ status; instead a ‘learning organisation’ is a state which is continuously being striven for” (Hodgkinson, 2000, p.159). Consequently, it is suggested that the learning organization is concerned with how to change the behavior of the organization and bring it closer to a desired state (Sun and Scott, 2003). The importance of the learning organization concept is supported by the view of strategic thinking as a processual activity (Mintzberg, 2000), where the focus is on the process and involvement of people within an organization. This is an alternative view to the more traditional approach of public administration and more recently New Public Management (NPM), with their respective focus on rational-design and outcomes, as discussed by Hodgkinson et al. (2017). Specifically, they outline how public administration and NPM adopted the public-goods-logic perspective and subsequently treat(ed) service delivery as a linear process of production and transaction. In contrast, and as they also note, a service-dominant approach draws much more heavily on those actors responsible for service provisions and their ongoing contribution to public value creation through service exchanges over the course of a service experience.

The subsequent emphasis of NPM on internally efficient organizations, then, has driven strategic decision-making as a top-down activity performed by senior managers (Hodgkinson, 2000; Osborne et al., 2015). In contrast, under learning organization philosophy decision-making develops through dialogue with organizational members and from the commitment of individuals to learning. Individuals in an organization are, therefore, viewed as a source of emerging information and knowledge to the enhancement of decision-making processes (Yeo, 2007), from which creative strategies emerge. This is particularly pertinent to the delivery of public value, which we suggest is a

countervailing narrative to the dominant hegemony of NPM and its rational-design approach to strategic management. Specifically, public value is a dynamic, not static, phenomenon that arises through ongoing activities (Hartley et al., 2017). But, even when public sector workers are committed to public value creation, can they actually influence strategic decision-making in public service organizations? The answer is 'yes', but only when there is empowerment within the organization (Hodgkinson, 2000) i.e., learning organization philosophy. Involving all organizational members in decision-making presents a significant challenge for public service organizations, particularly given the multitude of differing expectations, motivations and influences in service provision (Bryson et al., 2009). Learning to manage public service organizations better, therefore, becomes a critical issue for public management.

The contribution of this article is three-fold. First, providing a scenario exercise for public sector practitioners and educators to help shape a learning organization moves the learning organization discussion away from serving the needs of academicians toward the needs of practitioners, as called for by Yeo (2007). Second, the learning organization concept has been viewed as idealistic and, thus, too ambiguous for practical relevance (Chiva, 2017). In developing this scenario, the paradoxical nature of the learning organization is brought to the fore by embedding the tool within a contested space, as called for by Vince (2018). Third, the scenario tool provides a real-time mechanism to assess the contestation of public value and specifically how the perception of value emerges, changes, and is transformed as stakeholders contend with the tensions of a public issue, as called for by Hartley et al. (2017).

Managing public service organizations better: Learning for a Shared Vision

Public service organizations have to co-create service strategy and public value delivery with a range of individuals and groups. As such, organizational strategy "is one of the places we should look for evidence of the continuation of the [learning organization]" (Pedlar and Burgoyne, 2017, p. 120). Strategic decisions are consequently affected by a range of stakeholders often with diverging and conflicting interests (Osborne et al., 2013) and because of this, strategy making has to consider the whole range of interested parties to the public service organization (Moore, 1995; Benington and Moore, 2010). The basic scope of strategic management in the sector, then, is one of creatively balancing the range of demands and opportunities that an organization has to deal with for sustainable services. This has become more challenging as the environment facing public service organizations is now more complex (Haveri, 2006; Hodgkinson et al., 2017) and prone to sudden unexpected changes.

Consequently public managers must develop relationships that inspire stakeholders and create communities in which everyone, including user and provider, strives to contribute to the delivery of public value (Osborne et al., 2013). Yet, can the needs of all stakeholders' be met all of the time? This is highly unlikely and so there is a need to understand the expectations of different groups and weigh strategic priorities in terms of importance. So public organizations need to appreciate those stakeholder groups that are strategically important at any given time and learn how to acquire and manage that knowledge for strategy formulation and public value. This is where learning organization philosophy can help public managers manage public service organizations better. Specifically, while a learning organization philosophy concerns how organizations can survive and thrive (Pedlar and Burgoyne, 2017) it is the process of mutual learning (or adjustment) that is essential to generate

coordination through informal communication (Chiva, 2017). This is particularly pertinent to public value creation, which is “ascertained through a political process of deliberation and mutual adjustment” (Hartley et al., 2017, p. 673). Mutual learning in turn creates a shared vision, one that creates a common future and the establishment of collective goals that all members work towards. Defined as a shared picture of the future the organization seeks to create, a shared vision is not represented by simply a ‘vision statement’ but drives people to excel and learn independently, and represents a fundamental discipline of the learning organization concept (Senge, 2006). It allows for a transformation of the direction in service delivery and the competencies required for service improvement (Hodgkinson, 2000).

Public managers can steer these component elements of the learning organization through their willingness to learn “from all sources including the experiences of others throughout the organisation and ‘hard data’ and then synthesising that learning into a vision” (Mintzberg, 2000, p.107). This in turn generates commitment from all employees so that they work to create a common future, such that “...people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where corrective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together” (Senge, 2006, p.3). Therefore, the implementation of this approach requires public managers to review their closeness to staff, their level of communication and direction of that communication, and the ability to listen to staff at all levels within the organization for enhanced strategic decision-making processes. As Mintzberg (2000, p.108) notes, strategies must be free to emerge at any time and at any pace in the organization, “...typically through messy processes of informal learning that must necessarily be carried out by people at various levels who are deeply involved with the specific issues at hand”.

Rather than viewing this process as one of collective harmony, however, organizations are a gestalt of mixed emotions, beliefs, norms, and viewpoints where the development of a shared vision will likely reflect a ‘discomforting tug-of-war’, as highlighted by Vince (2018). While it is imperative that “...new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together” (Senge, 1990, p. 3), we integrate the paradoxical viewpoint presented by Vince (2018, p. 274) into our conceptualization of the learning organization:

“Any desire to create ongoing learning opportunities, to encourage collaboration and team learning, will be intimately connected to resistance to learning in an organisation, to conscious and unconscious efforts to avoid and undermine it. The desire to learn and the effort to resist learning are inseparable and persistent.”

The strategic challenge for public managers then becomes one of reconciling the learning organization with contemporary workplaces that are characterized by contractual relationships and metrics-based performance management, which inhibit learning (Pedlar and Burgoyne, 2017), as seen in the public sector (Hodgkinson et al., 2018). In addressing this strategic challenge, a scenario exercise is presented that seeks to move toward an actionable learning organization i.e., “learning that involves the capacity to unsettle the expected or given ‘way we do things here’” (Vince, 2018, p. 279) in the delivery of public value.

Delivering public value: A scenario exercise

“In public affairs, education concepts are often abstract, complex and contested. One of the approaches that can be effective in introducing public affairs concepts is playfulness—simple anecdotes, mini, one page composite cases and scenarios and even “tricks” that can all be used to motivate a given subject.” (Straussman, 2018, p. 93).

Following the same logic as Straussman (2018), a fictional case scenario—Robinstree Docks—has been created to illustrate the complexities associated with public strategy formulation and public value delivery. The aim of the scenario exercise is to develop the skills attached to a learning organization in a group activity that requires participants to: summarize evidence; make judgements (from one’s own and other’s perspectives); share thought processes on a contentious issue; and, arrive at a consensus together. These skills are particularly needed within the context of public value and can be best nurtured through management education, for instance, “Moore (1995) initially articulated public value theory in the context of executive education for public sector managers, who face problem-centred challenges calling for interactive and practice-oriented pedagogy and inductive theory, supported in particular by teaching cases” (Hartley et al., 2017).

The design of this scenario, then, captures the emotional, relational and political complexities and contradictions of learning in contemporary practice, features that are deemed essential to any adoption of learning organization philosophy, according to Vince (2018). Specifically, the scenario deliberately defies a purely economic analysis of costs and benefits. There is no single correct answer, and each of the five proposals to be considered by scenario participants has significant strengths and weaknesses (emotionally, relationally, and politically). The purpose of the exercise is not to promote an analysis of the ‘best’ option, but to enable a rich and detailed discussion of the wider concepts of public value and to encourage participants to understand the values that underpin their own conceptions and ‘what’ makes a worthwhile proposition. In doing so, participants are pushed to “...disidentify from one’s own ego” (Chiva, 2017, p. 155). By placing learners at the heart of the scenario and encouraging debate between groups, learners are encouraged to accept responsibility for the outcomes, intended and unintended, of the public value choices they make. The public value context helps add a layer of complexity and paradox to the application of the learning organization since “public organizations have wider responsibilities than just to the market and that these concern future generations not solely present value. Importantly, value is not static or inherent here but arises through activities (or desistence from activities in some cases), which are judged to be valuable or not” (Hartley et al., 2017, p. 672).

Administering the scenario

As way of introduction to the scenario it is useful to describe the characteristics of the public sector such as the complex set of interdependent goals, the range of beneficiaries (e.g. customers, clients, service users, citizens, businesses, agencies, and wider society), the highly regulated environment, and so forth. It is best if participants work in groups of around 6-10 people. The material required for the scenario exercise is as follows:

Resource 1: The Scenario – description of Robinstree Docks (one for each participant);

Resource 2: The Brief – description of the brief (one for each participant);

Resource 3: The Proposals – Each group should then be given information on each proposal, found in Appendix 1 through to Appendix 5.

Each group is then tasked with evaluating each other's ideas within the group (i.e., mutual learning) and developing a preferred option (i.e., a shared vision). The group's preferred option is the proposal which they believe is the most appropriate in the context of the scenario and brief, which will involve the contestation of public value. When groups have completed the task, each group should present their decision and justification to all other groups, in turn. This will generate a debate between groups bringing to the fore learning organization as paradox, which will evoke strong emotions (Vince, 2018). This debate is enriched by the focus on a contested concept—public value—as discussed by Hartley et al. (2017, p. 674):

“Activities, decisions, judgements and even language in the public sphere are often contested with different personal and social values expressed...different judgements, priorities, goals and interests. What creates public value for one person or community (e.g. rehabilitation of prisoners) may be anathema for someone else (e.g. with a more retributive stance towards prisoners).”

When run across practitioner and educational forums, this scenario has always generated conflicting views on which proposal is most appropriate given the multiple and conflicting objectives of the Borough Council and viewpoints of its different stakeholders. As well as the biases and opinions held by the individuals participating, we might add following Hartley et al.'s description of the public sphere. It is important to remind participants and groups that there are no 'right' answers here, and a supporting case must be built on a collective consensus. This pursuit of a collective decision can run for as long as the timed session, whether that is a workshop with practitioners or an undergraduate / postgraduate lecture or seminar.

Resource 1: The scenario case

Case: Robinstree Docks

Robinstree Docks is surrounded by a residential area, dominated by low-cost housing and with some schools and a small number of local shops. In the past few years, anti-social behavior has been reported as taking place in derelict parts of the dock, and the council are anxious to tackle this. They also want to be seen to regenerate the area as quickly as possible.

The area is in the worst 10% of areas for social deprivation in the UK and in the worst 1% of areas nationally in term of health deprivation, which is considered to be severe. The overall employment rate at 61% is below the national rate of 75%: in this area it is estimated that 5 out of 10 people of working age are unemployed.

The crime rate is high, though the majority of the crimes committed are at the level of burglary, criminal damage and anti-social behavior; serious crimes such as murder and rape are much less common. Around two thirds of the local population smoke. Obesity levels are above the national average, while educational attainment is below the national average.

Resource 2: The public value brief

You are working as a group of consultants engaged by Borough Council, in collaboration with the Department of Planning, Regeneration and the Environment. Your client has asked you to evaluate a particular issue and report back to them with recommendations on what should be done.

Robinstree Docks is a riverside area that once operated as busy industrial docks with adjacent grassland and parkland. Since the decline of heavy industries and docking the area has fallen into disuse, and has been derelict for over ten years now. In the last two years Borough Council has carried out a Compulsory Purchase Order on the land from its former industrial owners, with the aim of regenerating the area so that it can be used for a purpose that will benefit the local community.

Borough Council has a number of strategic aims for the Robinstree Docks area:

- To provide more jobs for local people, supporting existing employers and bringing new businesses into the area
- To provide better living conditions for local people
- To address a lack of leisure and health facilities
- To address a need for quality shopping
- To strengthen the residential community and improve the environment

However, the council has also run into severe financial trouble. The Government has now stated that it expects the council to find extra funding during this financial year. If savings of at least £200 million are not made, local services including rubbish collection, environmental schemes, and leisure schemes for young people will have to be cut by the amount necessary to make up the shortfall.

Therefore, the council also needs to make as much money as it can from the Robinstree development as well as trying to meet its objectives as effectively as possible. The situation is made more complex by the preferences of local residents for retail and leisure facilities offering low prices and straightforward entertainment, which don't necessarily fit well with all of the council's aims.

Planning applications were invited for the site and five proposals have been put forward. Your task is to assess the proposals and evaluate which of them, in your view, has the most to offer the community and fits best with the council's aims for the site. The decision will need to be explained to the local residents and all parties who have made planning applications.

In groups, review the five proposals and select which one you think is the best for the development of this area. You should draw up notes around each bid's strengths and weaknesses. Pick a single bid and then develop your ideas outlining your recommendation. Be prepared to justify your choice!

Conclusion

During a visit to the NASA space center in 1962, President John F. Kennedy noticed a janitor sweeping the floor. He interrupted his tour, walked over to the man and said, "Hi, I'm Jack Kennedy. What are you doing?"

"Well, Mr. President, I'm helping put a man on the moon", the janitor responded.

As this illustration shows, creating a shared vision to which all organizational members are committed is a powerful tool for the delivery of public services. To build a shared vision, all members should be continually encouraged to develop their personal visions because if individuals do not have their own vision all they do is sign-up to someone else's (Senge, 2006). The result is compliance rather than commitment. This requires that all members of the organization be involved in some way in the strategic decision-making process, which highlights the need to learn for a shared vision. However, as Pedlar and Burgoyne (2017: 124) comment on the adoption of the learning organization in practice:

"...the LO offered a far-reaching ambition and a vision of the company not previously glimpsed. This "living dream" was bound to fade with time, as various comments acknowledge, under the force of the drive for performance and also the fear that, even if the idea remained a background inspiration, no serious CEO, judged on quarterly metrics, would voice it in public."

Learning for a shared vision is central to the learning organization philosophy (Senge, 2006), which establishes the need for strategic decision-making processes to be truly decentralized while holding to a shared understanding of what strategic outcomes should and need to be achieved. But, 'how' these abstract elements of decision-making can be achieved in practice remains problematic, for example, how can managers create a shared vision? And what does a learning organization look like?

Following the logic of Vince (2018, p. 276), the scenario exercise captures the contemporary learning organization philosophy by forcing participants to "reflect on, for example, the emotions generated in the module group; what makes it function and malfunction; the limits and possibilities of learning and change; and the ability or inability of its members to communicate and contribute." The core skills required to participate effectively in this scenario exercise comprise: summarizing the evidence; making a judgement (from one's own and other's perspectives); sharing thought processes on a contentious issue; and, arriving at a consensus together, all of which are core for enhancing employability (Knight and Yorke, 2004). Moreover, this scenario exercise aids in developing 'competencies-in-practice' by enabling participants to "...read the contextual 'game', the rules, norms, values, and to be able to enact and react in ways which are positively justified by one's peers" (Nygaard and Bramming, 2008, p.404) within the context of public value. This context plays a crucial role here in developing understanding of the learning organization as paradox perspective. As Hartley et al. (2017, pp. 674-5) contend:

"...there are likely to be contests, debates and arguments between and among different stakeholders about what constitutes public value, because what contributes to the public sphere (as outcomes, as means of achieving those outcomes) will not be agreed in democratic societies. So research which maps and tracks those contests will be beneficial".

With regard to theory development, the scenario presented here can be adopted to empirically map public value based judgements. In other words, the scenario can become a mechanism to observe “how dilemmas, debates and contests are framed by different stakeholders through interaction”, as called for by Hartley et al. (2017, p. 680). This is a worthy avenue of future research that can draw on the scenario presented.

For practice, this scenario has been used effectively across different industry and educational forums (including non-management subjects) to develop actionable learning organization skills “through a realistic depiction of the organisational context within which learning takes place”, as called for by Vince (2018, p. 275). The contested concept of public value is an apt setting for practitioners and students alike to appreciate the challenges of striving to become a learning organization in practice. As Vince (2018, p. 279) emphasizes, “We can’t expect to create environments that support learning if we don’t also recognise the ways in which these environments will help to resist, avoid and constrain learning”; a paradox that is truly unearthed by emotive contexts such as public value. Therefore, the scenario exercise is as applicable to public managers or public policy students as it is to practitioners in the private sector and business students.

There are several justifications for the applicability of this scenario tool. First, the blurring of the public, private, and third sectors means that some of the constraints and pressures faced by public organizations are the same as those faced in the private sector (e.g., funding, income, competition, etc.). Second, all participants can relate to the issues covered in the scenario exercise as every citizen has a view, perception, belief, opinion of what public value is and/or should be. Third, focusing on a contested concept such as public value means that even the most corporate of practitioners will become embroiled in debate because of the emotive nature of the context. For instance, this scenario has been administered to an executive education class of wealth management practitioners who really engaged with the scenario for this exact reason. Fourth, public value transcends any one manager, organization, or even sector. Thus, the differing viewpoints one might find from public versus private practitioners is in essence the same as what is found in practice through inter- and intra-organizational working in service delivery. Finally, and ultimately, every individual will have clear views on the subject matter that may form extreme polar point, even if such individuals are employed by the same service organization. We feel that this is the true value of the scenario exercise and the focus on a contested concept such as public value.

In conclusion, by identifying the challenges faced (both individually and collectively) through participating in this scenario exercise, individuals can equip themselves to implement practices of the learning organization in highly ambiguous practical settings. It also allows a more subtle unpicking of organizational strategy teaching, addressing what Moore (1995) calls the ‘managerial view of public value’, and can inspire managers to learn more effectively for public value creation and delivery.

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Appendix 1: Proposal 1

Poseidon Developments shopping precinct

This proposed development would clear the site and build a 28-hectare retail park consisting of a range of 12 retail and leisure outlets. The park would be owned and managed by Poseidon Developments, a company who already run 3 similar developments across the country.

Companies interested in leasing units on the proposed park include:

Hypermarket (this would include a pharmacy)
Bowling Alley and Arcade Co.
Mother and Baby outlet
Stationery and Cards
Fast-food outlet
Convenience stores

It is estimated that the development would generate 150 new full- and part-time jobs. The bid would also generate £200 million.

Proposer's statement:

We aim to replicate our successful model of quality local shops featuring well-known and trusted high street brands in the Robinstree Docks site, and look forward to providing a range of consumer goods, services, and job opportunities that serve the needs of the local community.

Comments on the proposal, submitted to the council:

"I'm a bit concerned that there will be junk food readily available – our kids will come here and eat rubbish instead of staying at school during lunchtimes" - Clare Sneddon, local school nurse.

"It will make it easier for me to do my shopping close to home, instead of having to go into town for everything" – Angie Turton, local full-time mother.

"Good quality retail developments can be beneficial in regenerating a community, provided it connects with the needs of the community and doesn't just exploit them as cheap labour" – The Edwards Group Regeneration Consultancy.

OPEN store with maintenance of local historical dock area

OPEN is a well-known international furniture retailer looking to locate a new store in the Sunnyside area, the nearest store currently being 40 miles away. There are currently 15 OPEN stores around the UK and it is estimated that this proposed new store would create around 300 jobs. It would occupy the entire 30-hectare site and OPEN anticipate that once established, they would aim to expand the store and its car parking facilities further as required by purchasing adjacent land nearby. A large commercial investment of this kind would attract other inward investment, and allow the council to make more profit from the purchase of the extra land by OPEN, as well as the prospect of other businesses also wanting to buy land nearby. OPEN's bid would generate £250 million profit for the council.

Moreover, OPEN has offered as part of their planning application to maintain a unique part of the docks that is of historical interest. The city's first dry dock was built as part of the Robinstree Docks site. OPEN proposes to include an underground viewing platform so that visitors can view the remains of the 18th-century dock, which can be preserved as a site of archaeological interest. This marks a change of direction for OPEN as they have in the past been criticized for demolishing historic buildings when building new stores, in one case to extend a car park.

Proposer's statement:

Our business aims, as always, are to provide flexible, adaptable home furnishings in accordance with the principle of democratic design, at affordable prices. We have pioneered sustainable approaches to mass consumer culture and believe our approach would be highly beneficial in attracting consumers from all over Sunnyside to the Robinstree Dock site.

Comments on the proposal, submitted to the council:

"While OPEN stores draw consumers from far and wide, the traffic and congestion impact of a store on a particular community can be a challenge" – report on OPEN worldwide quoted in an objection to the planning application.

"I often go with my family to the OPEN 40 miles away, make a bit of a trip of it and eat in the restaurant, and if there was one in Borough Council I'd definitely go there instead" – Steve Brewster, architect working in city centre.

"We would very much like to see the dry dock, an important aspect of seagoing and industrial heritage, preserved for future generations" Maritime History Society.

Shore Holdings - mixed development of residential housing, day care centre for the elderly and hostel for 'at-risk' young people

This proposed development would incorporate three distinct developments side by side on the former docks site. Shore Holdings, a property and estates management company, propose to buy the whole 30 hectares, and to manage the overall upkeep of the site and to lease portions of the site to sub-developers for the following purposes:

- 1) A day care centre for local elderly residents, offering daytime activities, hot meals and drinks and access to advice on health and social care and benefits. The centre would generate 15 jobs.
- 2) A 30 bed hostel for 'at-risk' young people who have been made homeless and are considered vulnerable by social services; they may be ex-offenders, people with troubled family backgrounds or have other difficulties that have prevented them from finding work easily. The hostel would have counsellors and support workers available on site to advise the hostel residents on education, training and job opportunities. Such hostels have been shown to reduce reoffending rates for burglary and other crime by over 30% (Independent consultancy research).
- 3) A development of 20 flats to be marketed at affordable prices to key workers (e.g. teachers, nurses, social workers, or those on council house waiting lists) who can take advantage of a government scheme that funds part of their mortgage.

The bid would generate £170 million profit for the council.

Proposer's statement:

Our plans for the site offer benefits to a variety of groups, allowing the site to be used for a range of purpose all with benefits to the community. We are a local company with local interests at heart and this development will cater to local needs.

Comments on the proposal, submitted to the council:

"I'd like somewhere to go as a change from the bingo hall. Most days I'm just stuck in the house and don't see anyone, and I don't feel it's good for me" – Doris Anderson, local old age pensioner.

"I've been contacted by several local residents who are unhappy about the prospect of ex-offenders moving into the neighbourhood, and I am concerned that this will cause resentment in the local community" – John Carne, elected councillor for the Robinstree ward.

"There is a need for new and varied housing in the Robinstree Docks area that meets the needs of the local community and improves the environment" – Government agency report on regeneration in deprived areas.

Robinstree Sports and Leisure Centre with green space

This proposed development, put forward by the Sunnyside Sport Trust, involves constructing a brand new sport and leisure centre with gym facilities, swimming pool, sauna and fitness centre, indoor and outdoor squash and tennis courts, and an athletics track, on the former docks site. Running costs would be subsidized by Borough Council, as is currently the case with other sports/leisure sites around the city, so that low-income residents could use the facilities at reduced cost. The centre would generate around 70 jobs.

In addition to the newly built sports centre, which would occupy 20 hectares of the site, the remainder of the former docks would be resculpted as green space, including children's play area, benches, and shrubs and flowerbeds.

However, because the council subsidises the Borough Council Sport Trust by £20 million a year, this would reduce their profits from the site would be reduced by these costs, which will continue for the next 5 years. The bid would make an initial profit of £180 million. The planned map of the new site would also mean that a nearby primary school would have to be relocated because its classrooms would be too close to the chlorine tank used for the swimming pool, requiring more funds and forcing local children to travel further to school.

Proposer's statement:

This development would provide opportunities for people locally to improve their health, engage in recreational activities and enjoy the outdoors. We believe it is well worth investing in facilities to improve health and leisure for the community and would be keen to work with the council to achieve this aim.

Comments on the proposal, submitted to the council:

"I'm a bit worried about how secure it will be. There's been trouble with kids hanging around the old docks for years. If it's all redone as open space they'll soon be there but they won't be playing sport, they'll be smoking, drinking and harassing anyone who walks by at night" – Charles Baker, long-time local resident.

"Encouraging greater sporting activities in our young people is a priority for us, and we hope that bearing the costs will be worthwhile" – Sid Kramer, city council member.

"This is exactly what young lads need to get them interested in sport. I wish there had been more facilities like this around when I was growing up" – Ian Hodgkinson, former local resident and Manchester United/England footballer.

‘Robin’s Nest’ gated community with local school funding

This proposed development, from Goldman Baker Developments, a national property and estates company, would build a gated community of 120 luxury apartments with controlled resident parking, a small health/leisure centre for residents only, and 4 small commercial units suitable for retail purposes. A dry cleaner, sandwich shop and a small general store have already expressed interest in leasing these units. The apartments will offer riverside views and be marketed to high-earning professionals.

Borough Council has secured an agreement that Goldman Baker Developments will fund 2 multi-user games and sports areas, including a football ‘cage’ and new football pitches, in 2 local schools as part of their investment. They will also offer advice and initial office space and facilities to any local residents wanting to start their own business, to support more entrepreneurship in the community. Goldman Baker Developments are confident that they can outbid other parties interested in the land, and this scheme would generate the most significant profits for the council, at £350 million.

Proposer’s statement:

Our plans move the area upmarket and provide the financial and environmental support needed to regenerate the area on a larger scale. We are confident that this is the right approach to take for us and the local council.

Comments on the plan, submitted to the council:

“We don’t need flashy apartments around here, although if it meant they got burgled instead of me I might see a point to it” – Tony Vance, local old age pensioner.

“The city needs to think big and be bold enough to support this kind of development, something that will draw in the right kind of people. That’ll do more for the area than all sorts of council schemes” – David Morris, president of Chamber of Commerce.

“We can’t possibly afford to provide these facilities ourselves, so we’re certainly interested in the offer of funding” – Philip Mead, head teacher of local school.