Institute for Public Policy Research

THE MISSING LEVER

WHY PUBLIC SERVICE REFORM NEEDS SYSTEMS-WISE LEADERSHIP

Hollie Wright and
Ellie Harris

November 2026

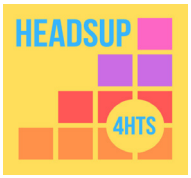
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hollie Wright is a research fellow at IPPR.

Ellie Harris is a principal research fellow and head of children and young people at IPPR.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank those who generously gave up their time to attend our systems-wise leadership workshop, their feedback and thoughts were instrumental to this research.







Download
This document is available to download as a free PDF and in other formats at:
http://www.ippr.org/articles/the-missing-lever

Citation
If you are using this document in your own writing, our preferred citation is:
Wright H and Harris E (2026) *The missing lever: Why public service reform needs systems-wise leadership*, IPPR. http://www.ippr.org/articles/the-missing-lever

Permission to share
This document is published under a creative commons licence:
Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.0 UK
http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.0/uk/
For commercial use, please contact info@ippr.org



INTRODUCTION

For most people in the UK, the state is encountered almost entirely through everyday public services. Whether that be through a child's school giving them a decent start, the availability of good care when someone falls ill or the efficiency of local bin collections, service successes or failures shape how politics is understood far more powerfully than any speech from Whitehall. When such services fail, the consequences are felt in people's everyday lives, and the government's promises of national renewal become harder to believe. Future political success will depend in large part on whether it can get these institutions working properly.

After more than a decade of austerity, much of the public sector has been pushed into permanent crisis management. The pandemic brought these weaknesses into the open and deepened them (Davies and Haile 2025). Public services have long faced complex problems but changing demographics and rising chronic need have made them more pressing, while lack of funding has hollowed out the institutional capacity to respond collectively and effectively (Quilter-Pinner and Khan 2023b). From delayed hospital discharges to youth unemployment, the problems faced by communities often sit across several institutions that rarely interact with one another.

At the same time, need for such institutions continues to outpace funding. Rationed support has served to entrench widespread political nihilism and a lack of faith that public services work for the people they're designed to support (Martin 2026). Reform of public services, therefore, sits at the foundation of any wider attempt to rebuild state capacity and public confidence.

Recognition of the pressures facing public services has opened the doors for progressive government policy to increasingly commit to integration, prevention and devolution, pivoting towards services organised around people's lives and designed with local communities in mind (HM Treasury 2025). The expansion of Integrated Settlements – with Greater Manchester and the West Midlands operating from 2025/26, and five further mayoral authorities joining from 2026/27 – means it is more important than ever that institutions have the capacity to share authority across organisational boundaries and act on local knowledge (MHCLG 2026).

But delivering complex, relational and place-based services is easier said than done. The prevailing model – hierarchical, compliance orientated, operating with linear systems – is unfit to deliver the services needed today. Moving beyond it depends on service design, but also on how people exercise judgement and work across organisational boundaries. Only with the right leaders, with the right skills, in the right places can we deliver lasting structural change. Leadership should therefore be treated as a core enabling condition for the next phase of public service reform.

Drawing on workshops with frontline public service staff and experts, we formulated five approaches to build 'systems-wise' leadership (McInerney and Robinson 2026). In practice, this calls for greater awareness of self and others, a nuanced reading of context and the strategic judgement to bring competing priorities together. Together, they recast leadership as a collective practice that crosses organisational boundaries, adapts to changing circumstances, builds durable relationships, and connects institutions to the places and infrastructure around them. Until our public service model supports and rewards this practice, government's reform ambitions will fail to deliver the best they can.

WHY PUBLIC SERVICES UNDERDELIVER

For much of the past four decades, the theory of New Public Management (NPM) provided the guiding model for how British public services are organised and scrutinised. When it first emerged late last millennium, it sold a coherent theory born from the entrepreneurial optimism of the moment. Its core thesis, that public services failed to improve because they lacked market incentives, led to importing private sector archetypes such as targets and performance management, as well as building quasi-markets through choice and competition (Quilter-Pinner and Khan 2023b).

This was not entirely misled; the NPM approach delivered tangible results in reduced NHS waiting times, better school attainment and higher crime detection, though how much came from reform and how much from investment remains unclear (Quilter-Pinner and Khan 2023b).

The same instruments, however, embedded perverse incentives in the system. For example, external targets incentivised school leaders to focus on a narrow set of academic outcomes at the expense of other measures such as belonging or wellbeing (Menzies et al 2023). When ratings and careers depend on such restricted results, staff may also become less willing to report mistakes, limiting opportunities for learning (Edmondson 1999).

The deeper problem, however, is that NPM's baseline assumptions have long since failed to describe the world as it is. That improvement is linear, demand is stable and competition drives up quality is simply outdated in systems characterised by complexity, interdependence and volatility.

The behavioural core of the model is also flawed. It treats staff and citizens as requiring reward and punishment to change behaviour, when the evidence increasingly identifies intrinsic motivation as the stronger driver (Quilter-Pinner and Khan 2023a). There is also evidence that stronger external reward systems can make some public services less attractive to people motivated by the purpose and meaning of the work, disincentivising cultivating positive personal qualities (Georgellis et al 2011). Over time, this dampens organisational culture and weakens the relationships that shape how well public servants perform (Ali et al 2021).

Despite investment since the pandemic and continued policies of marketisation and competition, total public service productivity in 2025 was still an estimated 2.5 per cent below its 2019 level (ONS 2026). More of the same, be it money or discipline, is a poor bet.

A range of alternative models to public service improvement has emerged in response to NPM's shortcomings. New Public Governance, Public Value Management, the relational state, mission-driven government and the foundational economy differ in emphasis but broadly converge on their diagnoses of NPM being a fundamentally outdated, impersonal approach (Foundational Economy Collective 2018; Quilter-Pinner and Khan 2023b). These alternatives reprioritise outcomes over targets, relationships over transactions and power held closer to place.

They also share the same gap. These frameworks are robust and clear on what should change on institutional design, funding geographies and accountability structures. But they fall short on how services improve in practice both within current constraints (the 'meantime') and how they are sustained on the ground by the individuals who run and maintain public services on a day-to-day basis.

The implicit assumption is that better architecture alone produces better practice, yet this overlooks the human machinery through which any structure must work.

That machinery is leadership. Leadership helps turn changes in formal structures into changes in how services operate. Under existing constraints, it allows people to coordinate across institutional boundaries and use judgement where existing rules and remits fail to match core problems. As services move towards a relational model, good leadership can build the trust and shared practice needed to work differently. This shift also requires a more integrated way of working, built on co-construction, shared responsibility and collective accountability.

LEADERSHIP: THE MISSING LEVER

By leadership, we mean the everyday judgement and actions of the people who run services; how they use discretion, build relationships and direct local institutions. This includes leaders' values underpinning their decision-making and the culture they choose to create. It is also a leader's knowledge, skills and exercise of agency in navigating complex systemic change.

Public services are not short of people who show the ability to embody these ideals to lead effectively. Even so, systemic perspectives remain largely absent from leadership development training. We largely lack an architecture that encourages and develops these core characteristics, so that they become the default mode of operating. Training and governing structures that focus on leadership as key to delivering public service improvement – and explicitly develop these skills and characteristics – are instrumental to delivering change.

Although structural constraints are by no means trivial, there have nonetheless been instances of places, programmes and public services that have weathered the storm thanks to skilled leadership within their systems. National downturns, funding pressures and statutory duties are major constraints, but how leaders use their judgement, character and skills can drastically improve outcomes.

To take one example, Greater Manchester has, with fair reason, been described as the 'blueprint' for devolved public services reform (Johnson 2026). From 2016, a partnership of NHS organisations and councils took charge of a devolved health and social care budget of around £6 billion. Recent assessments of their health devolution programme have noted modest gains in life expectancy concentrated in the most deprived areas, but less impact on other services such as outpatient care, mental health, maternity and dental services.

Improvements that occurred despite limited devolved control over resources have been linked to the alignment of leaders' decision-making across health, social care and wider services (Britteon et al 2024). Although the devolved settlement created an opportunity, whether and where it was taken depended on relationships between the leadership running services.

The acknowledgement that success under limited circumstances is linked to the power of local leadership is reflected in academic research. A substantial body of literature finds that differences in management and leadership practice predict differences in productivity and outcomes across public sector organisations – including clinical outcomes in hospitals – and that these differences persist between organisations operating under identical funding and regulatory regimes (Valero 2020). Many aspects of successful leadership lie outside structures and within adaptive behaviours.

Self-determination theory, for example, finds that people sustain effort when they have some control over their work, feel able to do it well, and feel connected to

the people with whom they do it (Ryan and Deci 2000). Workplace motivation has a collective nature. In a meta-analysis of 96 studies, it was found that teams' shared belief in their capacity to act together was associated with stronger performance, particularly where tasks were highly interdependent (Stajkovic et al 2009).

Target-driven accountability regimes, such as those championed by New Public Management, undermine these enabling conditions and can actively work against them. Research shows, for example, that when teams have low psychological safety, they hide errors and stop raising problems, which are core behaviours for adapting to complex services (Edmondson 1999). The old model therefore creates the conditions least likely to produce the leadership needed by complex services. If this diagnosis is valid, the question becomes: what does leadership that works with complexity (rather than against it) look like?

DEFINING SYSTEMS-WISE LEADERSHIP

Systems leadership guidance is hardly new, including within government (DESNZ and BEIS 2023). Most of it views problem-solving as rooted in analytical thinking and, to an extent, treats adaptive behaviours as a personal craft, built up in individuals through development training. We argue it is equally a matter of institutional design; conditions determined by policy choices that enable such behaviours.

This is why some organisations have reconsidered and redesigned leadership structures to adapt to the challenges of complex times. For example, Big Education's Rethinking Leadership group has worked with school and system leaders to design a model of leadership – systems-wise leadership – that reflects the complexity of public services today (Robinson and Hallgarten 2024).

Drawing on the work of Ken Wilber's integral theory, they argue for three connected dimensions of leadership: the self-awareness and values that shape judgement; the trust and understanding through which people act together, and leaders' capacity to recognise and reshape the wider systems in which they work (Wilber 2000). These domains are considered mutually reinforcing, with reflection informing action and experience deepening reflection (McInerney and Robinson 2026). Systems-wise leadership is also a practice of sharing, ceding and distributing power. Relational and place-based leadership widen who can decide, act and shape outcomes, including frontline workers, residents and communities.

This paper develops that insight, locating the necessary conditions in institutional design. Systems-wise leadership therefore operates as a distributed practice, exercised by people with different forms of authority and sustained by the systems around them.

THE ORIGINAL PRINCIPLES BELOW ARE PAIRED WITH WORKING EXAMPLES TO EXPLAIN THE CORE THEORETICAL TENETS OF SYSTEMS-WISE LEADERSHIP

Cross-boundary

The SEND (special educational needs and disabilities) system is an unfortunate example of what happens when cross-boundary responsibility is neglected and centralised rather than built organically (Morjaria et al 2025). Education, health and care plans (EHCPs) were designed as a single policy spanning three systems that had little history of working together. EHCPs, without relational foundations and the leaders to execute them, became a mechanism through which each agency could discharge its legal duty without taking responsibility for whether the arrangement was working holistically (NAO 2024).

The deeper issue is that coordination duties set by government are incomplete expectations. No statute or specification can set out in advance what cooperation between service leaders requires or looks like in each case. Gaps end up being filled either by trust and shared understanding between the people involved or widened by defensive compliance.

Working across boundaries requires longer term investment in and specification for relationships between leaders, alongside shared understanding. The current commissioning and accountability architecture gives leaders next to no incentive to make it work.

Adaptive to complexity

Developed by Dave Snowden, the Cynefin framework distinguishes between complicated systems – where the impacts of one's actions are knowable in advance and prior experience can be re-applied – and complex systems – where outcomes emerge from the interaction of many elements and cannot be predicted (Snowden and Boone 2007). In complex systems, more experimentation is required; leaders ought to pursue several approaches in parallel, building on those that show promise. However, currently, leaders are disincentivised from trial and error through systems of external penalisation.

Where that barrier has been removed, we have seen promising results, even in highly complex systems. An ongoing randomised controlled trial by Unlocked Graduates has taken prison wings at HMP Wandsworth and HMP Pentonville and let leaders design them differently. Officers for the trial wings have been selected for personal values, judgement and the willingness to build bridges. They were also trained fortnightly, including in leadership and value building, and given more autonomy over daily decisions. Interim data from the study reported 45 per cent fewer assaults, 57 per cent fewer incidents of self-harm, 62 per cent less general disorder, and roughly half as many staff sickness days (Unlocked Graduates 2026).[1]

Test-and-learn should be built into accountability frameworks, allowing public service leaders to test changes, judge them against outcomes, and revise or abandon them without fear. Institutions should carry the risks of experimentation, rather than leaving individual leaders to do so.

1 These are interim results and therefore not yet statistically significant. Full data is expected in December 2026.

Relational

Hilary Cottam's Life programme aimed to normalise relations between services and families whose needs were managed across multiple institutions. Before it began, one family had interacted with over 70 professionals across 20 agencies in a single year (Cottam 2018).

To tackle this, the Life programme arranged small and consistent teams of practitioners from different services, which families helped to choose. Families set their own priorities and worked with the same people over time. This gave practitioners the chance to understand how difficulties with debt, housing, school attendance, health and family relationships each interacted, and enabled them to work with families to address these together. After spending time to build trust, teams also helped families to develop their own capabilities and strengthen community relationships beyond the programme, so they were better able to manage obstacles independently over time.

Of the 12 families involved, the public service costs associated with three fell by an average of 61 per cent compared with the preceding six months. For a further five families, more intensive interventions, including eviction or a child protection plan, had been avoided (Leicestershire County Council 2012).

Good leadership is relational, choosing to centre the relationship as the service, against a system built to process cases separately.

Place based

The Wigan Deal, launched in 2013, reorganised services around seven local areas designed to reflect communities as residents experienced them. Leaders on council teams, the police, health services, housing, employment support and voluntary organisations aligned their work around these shared footprints. The council also invested in community hubs and local organisations, allowing services to build on assets and knowledge already present in each neighbourhood. Several health, social care and financial indicators improved, while the council made more than £140 million in savings (Naylor and Wellings 2019). Much of the model's foundations lay in treating local geography, institutions and community assets as the starting point for service design and decision-making.

The current devolution agenda gives local areas more scope to work in this way. Integrated Settlements bring funding from several departments into a more flexible pot, allowing mayoral authorities to direct spending towards local priorities.

But greater control over funding will only enable effective place-based working if leaders are encouraged to involve local organisations in decisions and distribute responsibility for outcomes across a place rather than over-scrutinising the performance of individual services.

Infrastructure enabled

Every example we have examined depended on resource conditions that were negotiated or protected. However, this is not always possible, and some independent actors have had to plug resource gaps themselves. In the absence of adequate local provision, Surrey Square, a primary school in the London borough of Southwark, runs a food bank and provides winter coats for pupils. Through the Old Kent Road Family Zone, which it facilitates, Surrey Square also acts as a civic anchor. A community board of parents and local leaders listens to residents, sets priorities and co-creates projects, while local people take paid and voluntary roles. This gives families more power to shape the services and spaces around them (Plunkett 2026; Local Government Association 2026).

In this instance, school leaders are therefore compensating for missing infrastructure. Leadership alone will be hard pressed to fix a plundered system. In some services, the binding constraint is structural in a more material and unavoidable way.

Leadership is a missing lever, but on its own it is an insufficient one, and leaders can only be stretched so far in difficult circumstances.

Where enabling conditions do not exist, we aim to advocate for sufficient local and public infrastructure alongside making the case for leadership, rather than treat exceptional leaders as a substitute for adequate resource.

ENABLING SYSTEMS-WISE LEADERSHIP

To explore how these enabling conditions could be created in practice, IPPR and Big Education convened a workshop bringing together leaders and experts from local and central government, the NHS, schools and education charities, social work, academia, and organisations specialising in public service reform. Alongside these experts, we tested our ideas – including the applicability of systems-wise leadership – in order to refine and build out from the concept.

Across the board, **participants identified accountability as the main institutional lever blocking best practice.** Leaders reflected that current arrangements are fragmenting responsibility between organisations and are making collaborative work hard to identify and reward.

Using their reflections, we propose four changes that would make systems-wise leadership a viable operating model:

1. **Accountability should reflect shared responsibility**. Central government should set a small number of national outcomes, while local frameworks should assess how well organisations work together and allow local leaders to challenge priorities. Time spent bringing together organisations should be recognised as part of service delivery. Integrated Settlements offer a starting point, provided central oversight leaves sufficient room for local democratic accountability (MHCLG 2025).
2. **Local policies should support leadership across organisational boundaries.** Cross-sector placements and joint appointments would give staff more opportunities to foster understanding and empathy. Exposure to different organisational cultures and ways of working could help leaders grasp the constraints facing other services, challenge their own assumptions, and bring new perspectives back to their work (Stoll and Robinson 2025). Promotion criteria ought to recognise those who build cooperation between services, including frontline staff and middle managers.
3. **The government should allow services to test and learn.** Public services should build regular review points into commissioning contracts and other service delivery arrangements. These review points should offer teams the flexibility to revise their approach as circumstances change. Any external scrutiny should distinguish between trials that produce useful learning and failures that could have been avoided. Local services should also connect and share findings between areas, allowing organisations to build on what has been trialled elsewhere.

4. **Leadership should be encouraged at every level of public service organisations**. Decisions are often concentrated at the top, even when frontline staff and middle managers are better placed to understand the problems services face. Public bodies should give staff a greater say in how services are run and invest strongly in their development. This could mean protecting time for, and investing heavily in, training and reflection for leaders at every level. Senior leaders have a particular responsibility to make this possible, giving others the freedom and support to lead.

These proposals build on ideas that are already well established, including within government guidance on systems leadership. The challenge now is to put them into practice more widely. That will require changes to the contracts, accountability frameworks and funding arrangements that shape how public services operate, so that leaders are supported and expected to work in this way.

REFERENCES

Ali AJ, Fuenzalida J, Gómez M and Williams MJ (2021) 'Four lenses on people management in the public sector: An evidence review and synthesis', *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, 37(2): 335–366. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxrep/grab003

Britteon P, Fatimah A, Gillibrand S, Lau Y-S, Anselmi L, Wilson P, Sutton M and Turner AJ (2024) 'The impact of devolution on local health systems: Evidence from Greater Manchester, England', *Social Science and Medicine*, 348. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2024.116801

Cottam H (2018) *Radical Help: How we can remake the relationships between us and revolutionise the welfare state*, Virago. https://www.hilarycottam.com/radical-help/

Davies N and Haile D (2025) 'Public services performance tracker 2025: Cross-service analysis', Institute for Government. https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/performance-tracker-2025/cross-service-analysis

Department for Energy Security and Net Zero [DESNZ] and Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy [BEIS] (2023) 'Systems leadership guide for civil servants', guidance. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/systems-leadership-guide-for-civil-servants

Edmondson A (1999) 'Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(2): 350–383. https://doi.org/10.2307/2666999

Foundational Economy Collective (2018) *Foundational Economy: The infrastructure of everyday life*, Manchester University Press. https://manchesteruniversitypress.co.uk/9781526164681/

Georgellis Y, Iossa E and Tabvuma V (2011) 'Crowding out intrinsic motivation in the public sector', *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 21(3): 473–493. https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muq073

HM Treasury (2025) 'Spending Review 2025, CP 1336', HM Treasury. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/spending-review-2025-document/spending-review-2025-html

Johnson T (2026) 'The radical rewiring of the state: What devolution must deliver', insight paper, Institute for Government. https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/radical-rewiring-state-devolution

Leicestershire County Council (2012) 'Appendix 1: Summary of evidence from insight phase', in *A community budget for families with complex needs in Leicestershire*. https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/documents/s70466/C.%20Appendix%201.pdf

Local Government Association (2026) 'Old Kent Road Family Zone: A community-led approach to tackling health inequalities: London Borough of Southwark', case study, 16 February 2026. https://www.local.gov.uk/case-studies/old-kent-road-family-zone-community-led-approach-tackling-health-inequalities-london

Martin J (2026) 'Public Service Reform: A new democratic delivery model to rebuild trust between citizen and state', paper, Demos. https://demos.co.uk/research/public-service-reform-a-new-democratic-delivery-model-to-rebuild-trust-between-citizen-and-state/

McInerney S and Robinson L (2026) 'Systems-wise leadership practice', in *Rethinking Leadership*, Big Education

Menzies L, Yates W, Huband-Thompson B and Quilter-Pinner H (2023) *Balancing Act: Navigating the tensions in our school system*, report, IPPR. https://www.ippr.org/articles/balancing-act-tensions-in-our-school-system

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government [MHCLG] (2025) 'Integrated Settlement: Policy document', GOV.UK. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/integrated-settlement-policy-document/integrated-settlement-policy-document

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government [MHCLG] (2026) 'Integrated Settlements for Mayoral Combined Authorities', policy document. https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/integrated-settlements-for-mayoral-combined-authorities

Morjaria A, Harris E and O'Brien C (2025) *Breaking the Cycle: A blueprint for special educational needs and disability (SEND) reform*, report, IPPR. https://www.ippr.org/articles/breaking-the-cycle-send-reform

National Audit Office [NAO] (2024) *Support for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs*, report, NAO. https://www.nao.org.uk/reports/support-for-children-and-young-people-with-special-educational-needs/

Naylor C and Wellings D (2019) *A Citizen-led Approach to Health and Care: Lessons from the Wigan Deal*, report, The King's Fund. https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/insight-and-analysis/reports/wigan-deal

Office for National Statistics [ONS] (2026) 'Public service productivity, quarterly, UK: January to March 2026, data and analysis'. https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/economicoutputandproductivity/publicservicesproductivity/bulletins/publicserviceproductivityquarterlyuk/januarytomarch2026

Plunkett J (2026) 'How to grow tomorrows', blog post, Big Education, 13 July 2026. https://bigeducation.org/be-blogs/how-to-grow-tomorrows/

Quilter-Pinner H and Khan H (2023a) *The Smarter State: Between the 'magic money tree' and the 'reform fairy'*, report, IPPR. https://www.ippr.org/articles/the-smarter-state

Quilter-Pinner H and Khan H (2023b) *Great Government: Public service reform in the 2020s*, report, IPPR. https://www.ippr.org/articles/great-government

Robinson L and Hallgarten J (2024) *What else? What next? What if? A report by Big Education and CfEY into the future of leadership development in England*, report, Big Education and CfEY. https://bigeducation.org/publications/what-else-what-next-what-if/

Ryan RM and Deci EL (2000) 'Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being', *American Psychologist*, 55(1): 68–78. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.68

Snowden DJ and Boone ME (2007) 'A leader's framework for decision making', *Harvard Business Review*, 85(11): 68–76, 149. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/18159787/

Stajkovic AD, Lee D and Nyberg AJ (2009) 'Collective efficacy, group potency, and group performance: Meta-analyses of their relationships, and test of a mediation model', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 94(3): 814–828. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0015659

Stoll L and Robinson L (2025) *Transforming leadership learning: Designing for sustainable, systemic change: A research paper*, UCL Centre for Educational Leadership. https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10215546/

Unlocked Graduates (2026) 'Unlocked Vanguard Wings: Fewer assaults, less self-harm and lower staff sickness', press release. https://unlockedgrads.org.uk/news-item/unlocked-vanguard-wings-fewer-assaults-less-self-harm-and-lower-staff-sickness

Valero A (2020) 'Impact: Management and productivity in the public sector', research publication, National Leadership Centre. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5f881eafd3bf7f633d82753f/NLC-thinkpiece-Impact-VALERO.pdf

Wilber K (2000) *A Theory of Everything: An integral vision for business, politics, science and spirituality*, Shambhala

ABOUT IPPR

IPPR, the Institute for Public Policy Research, is an independent charity working towards a fairer, greener, and more prosperous society. We are researchers, communicators, and policy experts creating tangible progressive change, and turning bold ideas into common sense realities. Working across the UK, IPPR, IPPR North, and IPPR Scotland are deeply connected to the people of our nations and regions, and the issues our communities face.

We have helped shape national conversations and progressive policy change for more than 30 years. From making the early case for the minimum wage and tackling regional inequality, to proposing a windfall tax on energy companies, IPPR's research and policy work has put forward practical solutions for the crises facing society.

IPPR
4th floor,
8 Storey's Gate
London
SW1P 3AY

E: info@ippr.org
www.ippr.org
Registered charity no: 800065 (England and Wales),
SC046557 (Scotland)
This paper was first published in November 2026. © IPPR 2026

The contents and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the authors only.

The progressive policy think tank