

Some thoughts following the first meeting of the Population Health Network

On Friday 6 December, GGI hosted the first ever meeting of the Population Health Network, looking at the governance implications of a changing healthcare environment, in which place-based health and care is likely to take an increasingly important role.

The session was deliberately non-directive, drawing together a breadth of stakeholders to engage with one another, share opinions and explore options. The topic was an interesting one, and brought about a lively, informed and useful discussion – but what struck me most powerfully was the value of having the space for these kinds of open-ended conversation at all.

Anyone who has ever worked in health and care knows that time is at a premium, and that breathing room to think, reflect and refine is rare - it is treated as a luxury, not a necessity. But the need for thinking time has never been greater. Our health and care systems are facing unprecedented societal challenges: we are living longer, and consequently require healthcare for longer. We have fewer healthcare professionals available to us, and we ask ever more of them, especially given technological and social advancements which have given rise to better opportunities and higher expectations of our health and wellbeing.

For a sector already under overwhelming strain, dealing with the immediate issues of the day necessarily takes a great deal of focus. But without time to 'think big' about the longer term, and to have conversations that are purposive but not constrictive about how best the future can be faced, innovative solutions are unlikely to be found.

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Nor is the problem confined to healthcare. The last decade or so has seen a marked cultural shift towards greater reactivity in much of the public sector. The landscape is both more complex to understand and less easy to navigate. There are no simple answers – but the role that good governance can play in creating the space to, at the very least, ask the right questions, should not be underestimated. It is essential that organisational leaders have the time and capacity to think critically, and to empower their staff (recognising the constraints of day-to-day pressures) to do the same.

At the Good Governance Institute we are very proud of the work we do to promote good governance, and events such as the Population Health Network are a vital part of this. We know that providing spaces for thought leadership and opinion forming on vital issues matters, and it is important to us that we both foster and are part of these conversations. We believe that enabling networking and collaboration is key to positive and smart change. No one person has the answer or power to create positive change and improve outcomes, we must work together for equitable, reliable and effective public services.

I look forward to our continued work to promote bigger picture thinking on critical governance issues like this for many years to come!