

Narratives and evidence in reforms to fire and rescue services in England

Pete Eckersley
Kasia Lakoma
Nottingham Trent University

**NOTTINGHAM
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NOTTINGHAM TRENT UNIVERSITY 

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@peckersley

@KatarzynaLakoma

Overview of presentation

Introduction

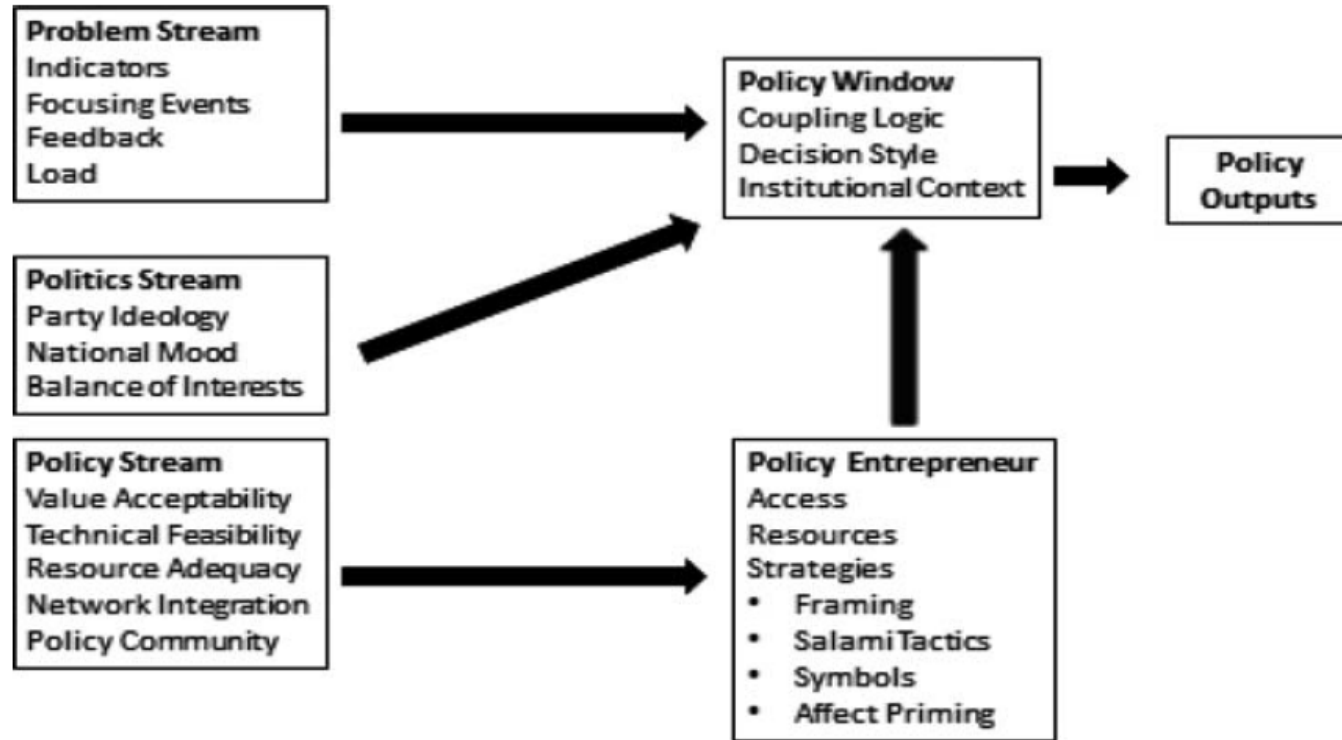
Multiple streams and narrative perspectives

Research questions

The case of P(F)CCs in England

Conclusions

Multiple streams approach



Taken from Jones et al 2016



Limitations and evolution of MSA

- ❖ Criticism that it is random and unpredictable with no clear power dimension
- ❖ Focus largely on reactive problem-solving rather than proactive policymaking
- ❖ Although the streams may be analytically distinct, actors can be involved in more than one simultaneously – and policy entrepreneurs can also be endogenous to the process (Ackrill and Kay 2011)
- ❖ Some have combined it with narrative approaches to help explain how policymakers try to effect change



Research questions

- ❖ How might proactive policymakers try to couple the streams and implement their preferred solutions?
 - ❖ If policy entrepreneurs are endogenous to the policymaking processes, does this help to explain power dynamics within the MSA?
 - ❖ Could proactive policymakers try to *straddle* the different streams to increase their chances of *coupling* them?
 - ❖ What strategies do proactive policymakers adopt to try and open policy windows? What role might narratives and 'evidence' play here?



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 of why this reform (i) is in the interests of economy, efficiency and effectiveness, *or* (ii) is in the interests of public safety
- ❖ We examined debates around proposed governance transfer in seven force areas: Essex, Northamptonshire, Staffordshire, North Yorkshire, West Mercia, Cambridgeshire & Peterborough, and Hertfordshire



Method

All seven areas conducted extensive consultations, including paper-based and online surveys and local events, promoted through social media, flyers, local press, TV, radio, etc.

We examined these consultation responses, along with the business cases, independent analyses, media reports, council and FRA documents

The consultations were structured in different ways, but responses varied by force/FRA area and also by roles (e.g. staff affected, residents, local politicians, etc)

PCCs are elected representatives, therefore we would expect them to be keen to use such public channels to get their arguments across

Consultation responses I

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

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

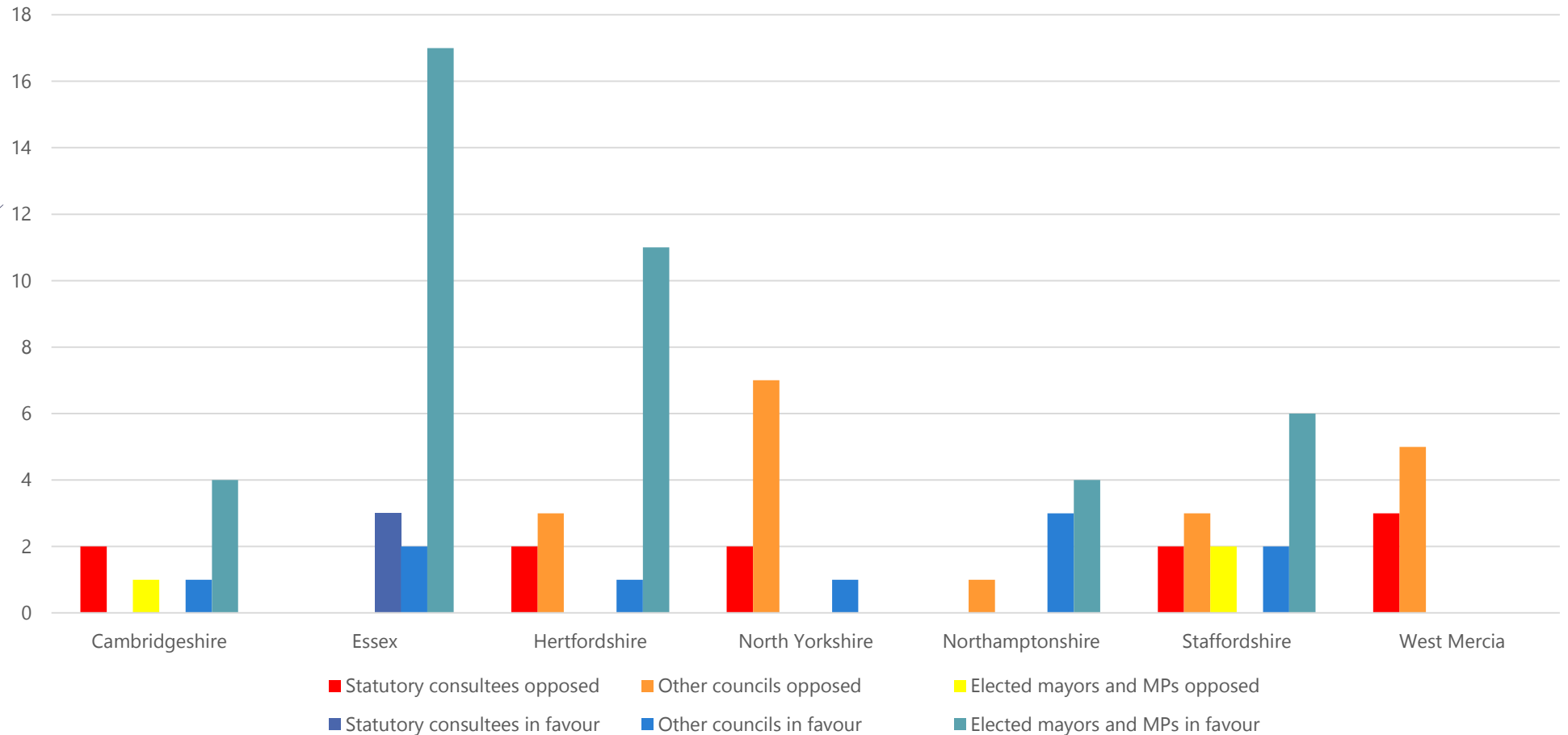
Consultation responses II

Essex

	1 – no benefit	2	3	4	5 – significant benefit
Representation	42	18	15	11	14
Governance	34	8	10	18	30
Single employer	45	13	15	12	15

	Staffordshire						North Yorkshire				
	Elected reps	FRS staff	Police staff	Residents	Public/VCS	Overall	Online	Residents	FRS staff	Police staff	Overall
No change	44	60	41	49	34	50	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Representation	14	19	5	10	13	11	40	22	27	48	29
Governance	26	12	26	23	30	22	48	61	59	27	55
Single employer	16	9	28	17	23	17	12	17	14	25	15

Who else supported and opposed change?






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 decisions currently under judicial review (Cambridgeshire & Peterborough and West Mercia)
- ❖ Hertfordshire PCC abandoned his proposal (along with seven other PCCs who considered change)



So, given that there was limited public support for change, how did some PFCCs manage to introduce their reform proposals?

What is the narrative/story around potential change?

	Finance		Democracy		Performance	
	"Savings" narrative (supportive)	"Cuts" narrative (opposed)	"Accountability" narrative (supportive)	"Power grab" narrative (opposed)	"Collaboration" narrative (supportive)	"Ain't broke" narrative (opposed)
Setting	Insufficient resources	Insufficient resources	Lack of scrutiny and accountability	PCC wants more power	Lack of coordination	Problem 'invented' by PCC
Villains	Not specified	Central govt	Current governance arrangements	PCC	Current structural arrangements	PCC
Victims	The public	The public	The public	The public	The public	The public
Heroes	PCC	Front-line public servants	PCC	None: there is no problem to fix	PCC	None: there is no problem to fix
Plot	Governance model will save money	Better funded public services	Elected PFCC will make services more accountable	Think about who should be in charge of public services	Governance model will improve joint working	Improved joint working
Moral	PFCC	Trust your public servants	PFCC	Many heads are better than one	PFCC	There are more important issues facing fire and police services



Problem narratives



- ❖ *“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)*



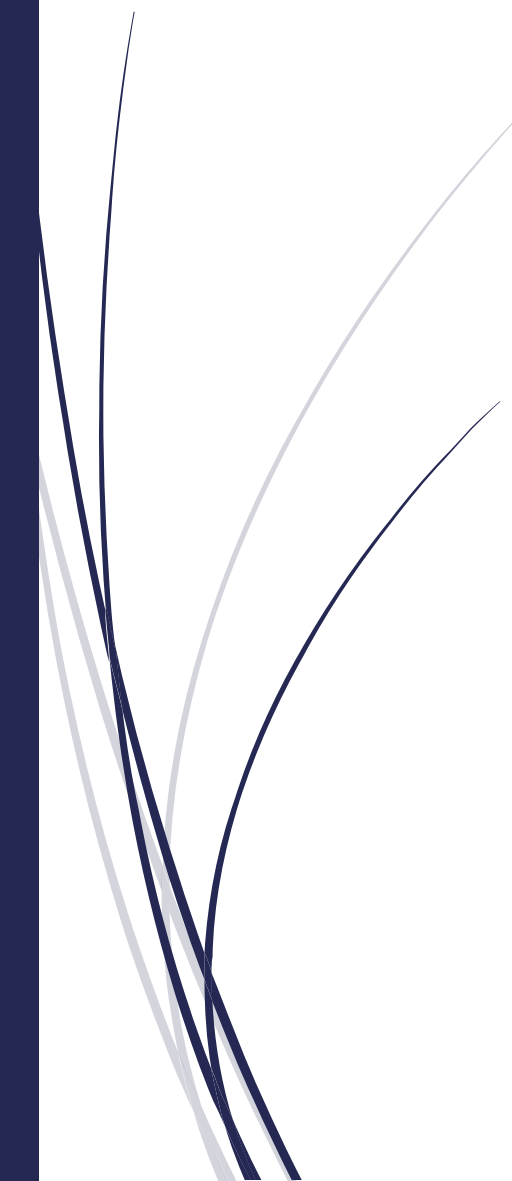
Counter-narratives



- ❖ *"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)*



How can the MSA help to explain this?

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- ❖ PCCs were involved in all three streams in each case: they helped to frame and broker *problems* that needed addressing; as endogenous policy entrepreneurs they championed a *policy* solution; and they were key *political* actors
 - ❖ *Straddling* the streams in this way made it easier to *couple* them
 - ❖ There was a window open in the *political* stream in each case
 - ❖ However, only in Essex and Northamptonshire were windows open in the *problem* stream
 - ❖ Attempts to construct a problem in the other force areas met with opposition from other local actors. This might mean the window in the political stream closes more quickly



Conclusions



- ❖ Policy entrepreneurs previously seen as exogenous to the process: if they are endogenous, and able to straddle all three streams, they are well-positioned to couple them
- ❖ The ability of policymakers to straddle the streams in this way introduces a power dynamic into MSA perspectives
- ❖ Coupling may be much easier if windows are open in both the problem and political streams
- ❖ Endogenous policy entrepreneurs can use narratives to construct and broker problems and thereby open a window in this stream – but this is not a foolproof strategy



Questions?

Peter.Eckersley@ntu.ac.uk

Katarzyna.Lakoma@ntu.ac.uk

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