

# Placecast episode two – Kostas Kollydas talks to Andy Westwood about skills

## Transcript

### **Nicola Headlam**

Hello and welcome to Placecast, a Local Policy Innovation Partnership Hub production based at the University of Birmingham. Placecast is essential listening for those keen to explore the ins and outs of knowledge mobilisation for influence in central and local government. Based on the view, it is only through animating the power of place based leadership. The wicked problems of 2025 can become more manageable.

Whether you're a researcher, citizen scientist, an activist, a professional working within the public sector, a civil servant, politician, analyst or entrepreneur, we think it's through our network and that most solutions can be assembled, tested and the learning shared, before we go again. And that universities connect to the repositories and observatories of these efforts. We are based in City-REDI and rooted in the LPIP program funded by the ESRC and Innovate UK.

This podcast aims to highlight the knowledge and evidence based ways of working, and the strategies needed to make a real impact on the decisions that shape our society. Our guests are changemakers from across the UK with stories about the ways in which influence can be achieved. We focus in particular on some of the connective tissue within and between sectors for clues as to how to animate place-based leadership, as innovating is a team sport best done in the open.

Please contact us for feedback on the episodes or if you'd like to be a guest, or have strong views on the processes of advocacy, lobbying, public campaigning and more. Unpacking how research and evidence connect with neighbourhood, local, city, regional and national missions. I'm Doctor Nicola Headlam and I coordinate the Placecast strand of work for City-REDI. And today's episode is a conversation between Dr Kostas Kollydas and Professor Andy Westwood, in which they concentrate on a very controversial area of skills policy. Who knows what we need for the workforce or how we prepare people? And of course, with a real focus on the work that Professor Westwood has done at the Productivity Institute in Manchester and in connecting policy solutions to the subnational governance structures that we have. Welcome to Placecast.

### **Kostas Kollydas**

Good morning. I am Kostas Kollydas and research fellow at City-Region Development Institute at the University of Birmingham, and I lead the skills theme for the Local Policy Innovation Partnership. Today I'm very excited to introduce Andy Westwood to share his insights. Andy is Professor of Public Policy, Government and Business at the University of Manchester. He's an expert in further and higher education, science, policy and local and regional economic development.

He has worked as an expert advisor to the OECD, the European Union, the International Monetary Fund, as well as a specialist advisor to the Select Committees on Economic Affairs and Digital Skills in the House of Lords. Andy, it's great to have you here today. Since last year, you have also been policy director of the ESRC funded Productivity Institute, which is based in Manchester, and that your work has been associated with driving more effective policy making, the areas of, productivity, skills and innovation at national, regional and national levels.

Can you tell me how you became engaged in this work and in your previous roles as well, please?

### **Andy Westwood**

Sure. Well, morning, Kostas, and it's a pleasure to join you on the podcast today. I came to all of those things that you've just described after a decade or so working in central government in the UK. So I worked in a series of government departments that unsurprisingly covered innovation, university skills, local government, and I also had a stint in the Treasury.

So really, I've come to academia and the role I currently have at the Productivity Institute at Manchester with that background, and as you mentioned, alongside some of that, I spent quite a lot of time working internationally, particularly with the OECD's LEAD program or what was then called the LEAD program, which stood for Local Employment and Economic Development.

So I'd done a lot of international work looking at cities and regions amongst OECD members, too. So that background and those interests that have brought me to the position I currently hold, but it's also brought my interest in all of those specific areas that you outlined on that basis. You know, I'm just not original. I can only work on the things that I've always worked hard and, here I am doing it again.

### **Kostas Kollydas**

Brilliant. Can you tell me how your work and your experience have just led you to engage with the LPIP?

### **Andy Westwood**

There's a long and a short answer to that. The long answer is really what I've just said. I've done lots of the different roles that I've described. The short answer is that is that someone asked me, and I was very happy to accept, because I think the LPIP and the LPIP hub in particular is a great initiative.

I think in all the policy organised actions that I'm familiar with or have worked with, particularly in the UK, I think the one area we tend to undervalue and underestimate the importance of is helping to build the capacity of institutions. The LPIP Hub and the individual LPIPs funded by the ESRC are obviously trying to address that. So I think that's a really important part of the jigsaw, and I'm really pleased that all of you are doing it.

I remember until we crossed paths last year as part of this case, Skills Evidence Review and your insights were very helpful in shaping the direction of this review. A key finding from this review was that in order to address spatial inequalities, it requires a better and clearer separation of powers between local and central governments, which would grant more authority at the local level.

And to achieve this, it will require a stronger capacity in local and regional situations, as well as ongoing financial support for address disparities. I wanted to ask you Andy, where do you think local and regional organisations should particularly focus the efforts when it comes to skills and policy?

### **Andy Westwood**

As you say, we start from a place where we have enormous, long lasting and in some cases growing regional inequalities. And the UK, in England in particular, is an outlier in OECD and European terms. On that basis. An often quoted line, which is a good one and bears repetition here comes from my colleague at the Productivity Institute, Philip McCann, who pointed out that the majority of people in England live in regions that are poorer than Mississippi. This is a clear and present challenge that we face both politically but also in economic terms.

We also start from a place, as we've discussed in the past, of extreme centralisation in the way that we govern and manage the country. Those things are connected. But getting to a place where local and regional government have the right institutions, central government allows them to stick to those institutions. You know, one of our problems is constant policy and institutional churn at the subnational level in England.

Once you've got to that point and you know, you've acknowledged those issues, then as I just said, building capacity is critical. You know, you've got to build institutions that have the right resources, that have the right expertise, that have the right powers to do the things that lots of regions and cities in other countries seem to manage to do without too much trouble.

I think building capacity matters, and I can't really stress that enough. The other two things that I think really matter and that kind of related one is that in England, Mayors and Mayoral Combined Authorities or strategic authorities, as we must now call them, have the power to convene not just public sector institutions, layers of government, but private sector firms, actors in a local place that matter. And I think that's a really, really important role.

The second kind of aspect of that which is connected is the at the local and regional level. You have the ability to coordinate across different actors, whether they're public and private, whether they're different parts of government in ways that central government finds and continues to find really hard to do.

It finds it hard to do that centrally, let alone kind of within the region. So, the key sorts of things that you can do at the local and regional level that that matter most are convening that coordination and with some help from outside and above, building the capacity of institutions to be able to do those things.

## **Kostas Kollydas**

Brilliant. And you mentioned the mayoral strategic authorities. Is there something you have seen recently that really impressed you in how combined authorities have handled the Adult Education budget, which is now known as the Adult Skills Fund, and for people who might not be aware of this. This fund supports education and training for adults aged 19 and over, and the focus is on equipping them with the skills they need for employment and career advancement.

So Andy, is there anything that has particularly impressed you regarding this at the combined authority level.

## **Andy Westwood**

There's one thing that's impressed me, and there's probably one thing that's depressed me. So let me pick up a little on both of those things. Starting with the good news with the things that have impressed me. And this is true across multiple mayoral teams and combined authorities. But let me pick out in particular greater Manchester and the West Midlands, because those are the two that we both sit in. In both cases, what's been impressive is that both processes of taking on the kind of responsibility for these funds have started with a clear kind of question, which is, you know, how do we use this resource to drive the things that we care about?

And that brings us back to the discussion we've just been having about what are the things that matter and how do you coordinate them? What are the priorities or what are the particular challenges in a place? So, you know, taking Greater Manchester, you know, there's a particular challenge around low skills amongst the adult population. It's not uncommon across the English cities and regions.

There's also a kind of big challenge on ill health and worklessness. So it's been a some might say this is blindingly obvious, but it's been a starting place for people taking on those budgets to kind of say, well, how can we use this budget to address those issues? Now that does sound obvious, but it's not really happening at the national level in the same way. And it just gives you an example of how a local lens helps you to kind of start afresh or to think anew, can you about what are the priorities that you want a particular resource or set of powers to address.

On the slightly depressing side, and this is more a kind of warning rather than a problem. I think in doing that, some authorities have recreated quite strong layers of bureaucracy. So in other words, you know, there's been a bit of replication, duplication with the way that agencies controlled by the Department for education have allocated funds. There's a slight caveat to the thing that that is impressive, which is not to sort of overcompensate for that kind of previously sort of centrally driven kind of mindset and to create lots and lots of tiers of oversight or accountability or strategic direction in the mayor's office or in combined authority that that looks after these budgets.

Worth watching. We don't want systems to think this just feels like working to a centralised form of control. It's just a little bit closer to us. So a slight word of warning there, but I think, I think the most important thing, particularly in our two city regions, has been this willingness to sort of think, well, look, what do we want adults to acquire in terms of skills that will kind of help them in the city regions that we're responsible for?

## **Kostas Kollydas**

Great. And this is very insightful and important as well. And this brings me nicely, I would say, the next section on devolution. Particularly, what would you say are the biggest lessons, the biggest learning points across the four nations when it comes to skills and policy? And if you had to pick one thing, what would England, for example, learn from Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland? And just as importantly, what can those nations learn from England and from each other?

## **Andy Westwood**

Just the question in itself is a good one, because in English policy making we tend to overlook the other nations in the UK and what they're doing rather too much. And actually, I think there's a lot to learn as skills, policy and other policies have diverged across the four nations, seeing what they've tried to do differently and evaluating whether they've worked or not. I think it's an incredibly important thing to do, and we don't do enough of it. Specifically, the things that that England may learn really sort of come back to the same themes I'm talking about in my answers to kind of previous questions. The particular one that stands out for me here is lessons that England could learn, particularly from Wales, where they're attempting to really join up not just 16 further education, higher education, work based learning and adult education, but also in some cases, innovation policy too. And obviously, they're trying to do that through tertiary reform in the creation of Medr. But now, you know, that's a long process. And setting up a new institution, as I've said, takes time. Building capacity and expertise takes time. But seeking to do it across all of those different parts of the broader system is really important and useful for English policymakers to watch.

You know, that's precisely what we don't do. All of those operate different systems. You know, they're not as well coordinated with each other as they might be. And it means that, as many of us have pointed out over many years, we've got a very fragmented system for delivering skills across those different sectors. And, employers and individuals and places, often get lost in that incoherence, that fragmentation.

So I think that's something we can learn a lot from, just that sort of mindset that we might be able to coordinate and join up these different things better. I'd also picked out some of the work that's happened in Scotland, and particularly around utilising skills. So another area we're a bit weak on in England, we set many of our targets in the supply of skills, rather than the kind of demand and utilisation of skills.

And Scotland have tried to sort of look at kind of, well, what happens to people when they come out with particular qualifications of different bits of the education system? Are those skills utilised in particular sectors or places? So I think that's another that's another area. But there are many more examples that that we could learn from. And finding ways to do it regularly is also a recommendation in itself I think.

## **Kostas Kollydas**

Perfect. You mentioned this. good examples and also the challenges regarding the frontline skills systems from delivering skills. And, I wanted to ask you from your perspective, are there

any places internationally that we could be learning from, for example, could be a country, a region, a city, and examples that you could share?

### **Andy Westwood**

Yeah. Well, let me pick an obvious one. I mean, in many ways, there are loads of countries we can sort stuff from and loads of, cities and regions to. So over many different governments. And I've done this, I've been on these trips to but governments of different political persuasions with different sort of ideological kind of approaches to skills and to growth.

Everyone goes to Germany and looks at their technical education system. Most politicians and policymakers tend to come back and say, well, why haven't we got one like this? And so we see a series of reforms with a narrative that says, you know, we're going to we're going to have a better system than the German technical education system. Lots of people now might say, well, there are some stresses and strains on that German system, but let me pick positives that I don't think we learn when we go there.

That brings us back again to the conversation we've been having. And it's look at the kind of world of governance and institutional social strategy that that technical education sits within. Germany is interesting constitutionally because of the balance between local and regional power and local and regional governments and the kind of federal government. And that interrelationship, that multi-level governance in the constitutional sorts of languages is something that we don't tend to think, well, where does this technical education system set in? Who's got responsibility for it? Understanding that is really important.

The other thing that we also massively sort of underestimate when we go to Germany is kind of the levels of institutional autonomy that that still allows and enables. So it isn't just a matter of all the different layers of government that have responsibility over the institutions that deliver technical training. There's also serious institutional autonomy and expertise and flexibility invested in the system institutions. The technical colleges driving that provision in different parts of Germany have enormous capacity and flexibility to do it. They have the direct relationships with employers in that area and with trade unions, with chambers of commerce. We don't often take that conclusion and bring it back to our assessment of where the English system is failing or succeeding.

Germany is a good example for lots of things. It's one that we often read about and think about, but rarely for those reasons, rarely for the spirit of autonomy that people on the front line have, but also that kind of multi-level governance, that relationship between the regions and the centre that, again, kind of, you know, is very, very different to the way we currently organise things.

### **Kostas Kollydas**

That is a very insightful answer, and thank you very much. Another thing that I want to ask you. The pace of change in, digital skills and AI – Artificial Intelligence. What you feel is needed to help people keep up with evolving skills throughout their lives. And what role in, the local organisation that we discussed earlier play in that?

## **Andy Westwood**

It's obviously important to think about how rapidly technology is changing, whether that's AI or other forms of technology and the impact that has on people who are already in the workforce, people who've left the compulsory phase of their education experience. Obviously, there are other transitions to the transition to net zero is a critical one as well. But going back to some of the things that I've already described, we're starting from different places and in many ways we're also still coping with the transitions of the past. You know, in cities like Birmingham and Manchester and Leeds and Newcastle and Sunderland and Wolverhampton and Dudley, you know, we're still feeling consequences of the switches, the structural shifts from industry and manufacturing to kind of more service sector based economies. We've still got workforces that are under skilled or have lower skills than other parts of the country.

Understanding where we're starting from, I think is really important and all of that together. And you realise how important adult education, adult training is going to be and arguably has always been. But so much of our system in England is front loaded, even in the sort of post 16, post 18 parts of the system. It's very much aimed at kind of people at the beginning or before they've even got into careers. And I think kind of that balance has sort of tipped even further in that direction over the last couple of decades. And it's the wrong direction. You know, we need to find ways of creating more opportunity for people to learn.

It's not all the state's responsibility. Over that same period, we've seen the level of investment from employers in training and development fall pretty steadily. And they're part of that sort of adult education ecosystem as much as the state is, whether that's at national, regional level. But I think it's a national kind of renewal of effort that we need. It's a process, I think, that has to understand where we're starting from. And again, that takes us back to, that regional inequality that is so marked in England and across our cities and regions that are underperforming, not just the, UK averages in economic growth and productivity terms, but also their comparator regions and countries across either the OECD or the rest of the world.

We need to prepare people for transitions, but there are a lot of them, and we still haven't got lots of the transitions that we've been through right. The solution to that is really about a big culture shift in how we conceptualise this, but also how we invest and how much we invest in things.

The other reason we should highlight this at this particular point in our existence is that, you know, we have a government who wants to prioritise things, whether it's through missions or industrial strategy. You don't get to build 1.5 million houses or reform the NHS or, you know, power ahead with defence expenditure by waiting for the education system to deliver kind of young people through the initial education system into those jobs. You know, you have to start rather sooner than that. And the way you do that is through education and training.

That's a process that the current government is currently working their way through, realising that, it's not going to be the kind of successive entry from younger cohorts into the workforce that allows them to achieve these objectives. It's going to be how do you catalyse kind of much more education and training amongst the kind of workforce that's already there to achieve the kind of particular priorities that you set?

## **Kostas Kollydas**

Perfect. I would like to come to a bit more specific question. You highlighted the importance role of places in the developing skills and some of the challenges that are associated with that. Can you think of a specific person, a really good place leader in the UK?

### **Andy Westwood**

Yeah, I've been thinking about this one. There were some good candidates, but, the one I ended up thinking about most is a guy who ran and still runs an FE college, actually. And it's, Alun Francis who, I've known for a long time, mainly when he was principal of Oldham College, up in Greater Manchester. You know, one of the more deprived parts of Greater Manchester, a town that is at the wrong end of lots of data on deprivation and kind of life chances. He now runs Blackpool College, which is, if anything, often lower, down those same league tables than Oldham.

But Allen is also the chair of the government's, Social Mobility Commission, and he's very interested in place generally and how you think about social mobility in relation to the local economies and different attributes of particular places. He is someone running a bit of, of the system that that often does the heavy lifting. when he was at Oldham, we worked together on an economic review of Oldham, which was commissioned by the local authority and by the combined authority in Greater Manchester.

And we spent a year looking at what was going on in the Oldham economy, what had kind of created it, what were the tensions, what were the challenges, and how should it sort of think about itself over the next decade or two? And in many ways, he's replicating that in Blackpool.

All of that work has been fantastically impressive, but maybe the most impressive thing has been someone from within the system, within the school system and often, you know, in for the bit that's the least well resourced, the most directed. You know, here's somebody who, despite those things, has taken the lead, put his institution at the centre of the discussions about what an economy needs and what it's going to look like and what those challenges are and how to address them. And convened a process that allows, you know, not just him to learn those lessons, but a whole bunch of people across the town and the city, region and national government to yeah, I think I'd pick Alun on that basis. And he's not been in Blackpool that long, but he's already doing some really interesting things in a in a town that has a lot of challenges that are well known in anyone, for anyone that kind of thinks about regional and local inequality in, in the UK.

### **Kostas Kollydas**

In a similar vein, and you described a really good knowledge broker. They can be an academic, they can be in industry. Someone you know can knock on their doors for their views, people that they've worked with. And you really thought, yeah, they get it. It comes to mind.

### **Andy Westwood**

A lot of people get it. You know, a lot of people associated with the output as we've discussed. Get it? A lot of academics understand this, a lot of politicians understand this. A lot of institutions, whether they're principals like Alun or vice chancellors, leading universities get it.

I think the issue once you've got it is, well, what are you going to do about it? And doing something about it requires time and effort and persistence. And it's often time, effort and persistence that the kind of system that you sit in in your day job doesn't recognise or reward. So you almost have to accept that you're going to beat your head against the wall of resistance within institutions or within a particular sector in order to find that time. Because if you don't, all you're going to bring is, an understanding of the problem rather than the kind of solution to it.

A colleague of mine in the north east, Louise Kempton, who now runs CURDs at the University of Newcastle but also runs Insights North East, which is a Research England funded regional kind of observatory sort of policy function run out of the University of Newcastle.

You know, she describes this as kind of countercultural, finding the time and actually sort of doing the work. It goes against cultures of academia, different parts of the skills system that takes effort, sustained over time. So Louise and her colleague Liz Shutt shut how between them they run Insights North East I think are doing fantastic work across the North East and across five universities, I think in in that region, and obviously also with the relatively new mayor and combined authority in the North East too.

A little bit closer to home my colleague in Manchester, who I work with on the Oldham economic review, Richard Jones, who you know, is someone who has spent more time than you would expect a pro-vice-chancellor level interested in R&D. He spent much more time in the kind of Oldham's and Rochdale's of this world that in kind of almost anyone like him in English higher education.

And then another person I would throw into this roll of honour, this sort of slightly dubious roll of honour is a someone that we all know. Tom Forth, based in Leeds, runs a private sector technology organisation, lots of AI. And he dedicates time, he's written with Richard Jones, does a lot of work, done a lot of work in the West Midlands, a lot of work in Greater Manchester, a lot of work across the North. But he's also someone who doesn't just bring a particular level of insight. He puts time and effort into it. He does the heavy lifting, does the sorts of data projects on bins and busses that, often make such a difference in these places. So there's a handful of people that I often think, where did I get the time to do this stuff? But I'm very, very pleased that they do great.

### **Kostas Kollydas**

And these are very interesting people that we can all learn from, and we have already learned from a lot from them. Looking ahead, what do you think are the biggest challenges for local areas and regions in the next five years or so that they need to address? Do you think there will be new challenges that may come up, or the existing ones that you have already described?

### **Andy Westwood**

Oh, well, I think I think many of the challenges are the ones we've discussed. It's building institutions, it's building capacity, it's convening and coordinating. And for many established

institutions, you know, that still applies. As does the unfortunately constant kind of back and forth with central government over relatively small chunks of power and resource. And we can see that in the run up to the spending review and we can see it the relationship between the centre and the local.

I think for whole chunks of the country, you know, that that challenge is, is about building brand new institutions. I mean, I mentioned the North East combined authority just now. You know, it's just, obviously it's reconfigured itself spatially from just being kind of part of the region to being the full region. But has only had that combined authority and mayor in place since last May.

That is a huge job to add somebody else to the list we were just discussing. It's something that we saw Andy Street do in the West Midlands. You know, he inherited an office, obviously served two terms, but did a lot of work behind the scenes building an organisation that, obviously the new mayor, Richard Parker, has inherited and, and, you know, will definitely make his life easier in, in Greater Manchester, the same thing happened.

You know, the foundations were laid, of course, by Howard Bernstein and Richard Leese and others and Andy Burnham was able to kind of pick that up. But across other parts of England, as, as new combined authorities are being created, you know, they're going to have to go through the same thing.

I spoke to, one man, recently, Claire Ward, who's been elected as mayor in the East Midlands. That's a sort of subregion that hasn't even got a transport authority, you know, so from appointing staff, creating the institution from literally from kind of ground up, you know, these are huge challenges. We talk a lot about the inequality and centralisation of governance. But, you know, you're not going to be able to take on new powers unless you've got something that can take them on. Building those institutions is hard, but it really matters.

With the devolution white paper that came out before Christmas, obviously you can see a whole new swathe of areas where devolution map is being kind of completed, where they're finding the right footprints. It's important not to underestimate how hard that is, working your way through local politics to form a kind of partnership that you can then start to build institutions from. So all sorts of places kind of catching up on that now.

But I think at the same time, the challenge for those that have been around for a while is, you know, how do you continue that and how do you persuade central government to take on more responsibility so that mayoralities, those strategic authorities, you know, a big a second tier cities, how can they really begin to not just look like they're comparator cities and regions in other countries, but also act like them in terms of their administrative responsibility and their kind of economic contribution to their respective countries as a whole. It's about completing the map and bringing lots of people to the level that some organisations are at. But it's also about understanding that there's always going to be some institutions kind of continuing to push and to take on new powers simply because they have a stronger economic case to do so, and obviously a stronger track record in taking on powers and discharging them effectively.

Economic geography isn't always fair in that respect. And if you're going to solve Britain's long standing productivity problem, you're going to have to focus some effort on the particular second tier city problem we've all observed over the last, 20 to 30 years.

**Kostas Kollydas**

That's very insightful, Andy. Now again, looking ahead, are there any upcoming projects or initiatives that you are working on that, aligned with these themes that we discussed today? And what impact do you hope that they will have.

### **Andy Westwood**

Often, you know, you just want to get stuff out the door. And I've got I've got quite a few things coming up. Lots through the Productivity Institute. I think in the next few days I'll have an essay on how this current government really needs different strategies for growth across the country.

We've seen Rachel Reeves obviously really put some effort into the Oxford Cambridge corridor and into transport projects, including Heathrow, around London. It's fairly clear that those processes of deregulation, of planning reform will make a big difference and are really important things to do in in those places, but they aren't necessarily going to have the same impact in other parts of the country.

So, you know, you need different strategies. You need a kind of a more active role of the state, either to de-risk investments from the private sector or to, you know, address some of the sort of weaknesses in infrastructure or public services across different places. So, so it's an argument for having kind of different strategies for, for different places. Again, nothing that anyone listening to this podcast won't be familiar with.

I've been working on something else, something quite similar on post 18 education in England, and kind of how you coordinate that and bring that together in that context, you know, places that are very different. And then finally, continuing to do lots of work on the lessons that we can take on price based industrial policy from other countries, whether they're in Europe or the sort of recent efforts in the US, have become slightly less fashionable now that Donald Trump's in office. I may be understating that slightly, but the whole suite of things that happened under, Biden that involved place based investments in place based thinking, I still think there's lots of lessons not just for us to learn, but clearly for the new administration in Washington to learn, too. So lots of stuff on that, more of the same stuff that you'd expect me to be writing and kind of thinking about. But hopefully they'll land on the desks of the relevant government departments in the UK and regional authorities that will take those lessons and suggestions and find something to do with them.

### **Kostas Kollydas**

These are all really exciting projects and, looking forward to learning more about these. Just one last question, Andy. I have a kind of moment of foolishness. I'm going to let you have a go with this, which is, my place based innovation magic wand. You need to be very careful with it. It has powerful magic and can grant you a wish. You will have absolute power to do one of the things that I will mention in a moment. But you must use your powers to make a tangible, change with a specific place. So your change will be specific, measurable, actionable, recordable, and transferable. A SMART change. Magic is hard to get hold of at the moment and be subject to a 20% reducing multi-year budget settlement.

So just to get you started Andy. You can have a 10 million project fund, half an hour with a cabinet and a slide pack. Editorial control of the front page of a tabloid, a clause to insert into a

bill a very simple message that goes viral on TikTok. Anyone from any walk of life as an advocate for this work, or an answer to a question that has bothered you forever. So here you go. What is the magic thing to make this agenda fly?

### **Andy Westwood**

Let me roll out a few to start off with. I've tried and failed with 10 million project funds, various points in my life. Likewise. You know, maybe not half an eye with a cabinet, but something sort of fairly close to that. And clauses in bills.

The interesting thing that or one of the many interesting things that sort of set at this time that we find ourselves in this sort of built up. I've been reading a book, called The Siren's Call by a guy called Chris Hayes in American Book basically talks all about the attention economy and getting people's attention. So I'm going to lean towards either the front page of a tabloid, an editorial control, or having an advocate or possibly TikTok, but I'm assuming that a good advocate or a good tabloid has got their social media going at the right sort of level.

What I want is attention for a place I might as well say, as most people will know, I'm from just down the road from where you're sitting. I'm from Wolverhampton. So, getting attention for kind of the particular challenges that that place faces, not just in the kind of the West Midlands, but in the country as a whole. I feel it, you know, you can learn a lot from just spending the day Wolverhampton. I've certainly learned a lot from spending many days there. So I'd either get a tabloid to run a front page on it, or a powerful advocate to spend a decent amount of time in the city, because I think actually when you boil it all down, lots of the things we've spoken about already today, you know, they're pretty obvious things. People need training. You need to think about what jobs people are going to do. You need to run public services in a decent way. You need to kind of value people for who they are and where they are. And, I can't think of a better place to do that than the snug of a bar in Wolverhampton. I can even name the pub if you want.

### **Kostas Kollydas**

I think that's a great note to end on. And before we close, is there anything else that you like to add?

### **Andy Westwood**

Well, the pub would be the Great Western next to the station or the Posada, about five minutes walk. But other than that, I don't think there's anything else I could possibly add.

### **Kostas Kollydas**

Great. Thank you very much, Andy, I appreciate your time. And, I really enjoyed our conversation. many thanks for that.

### **Andy Westwood**

No problem at all.