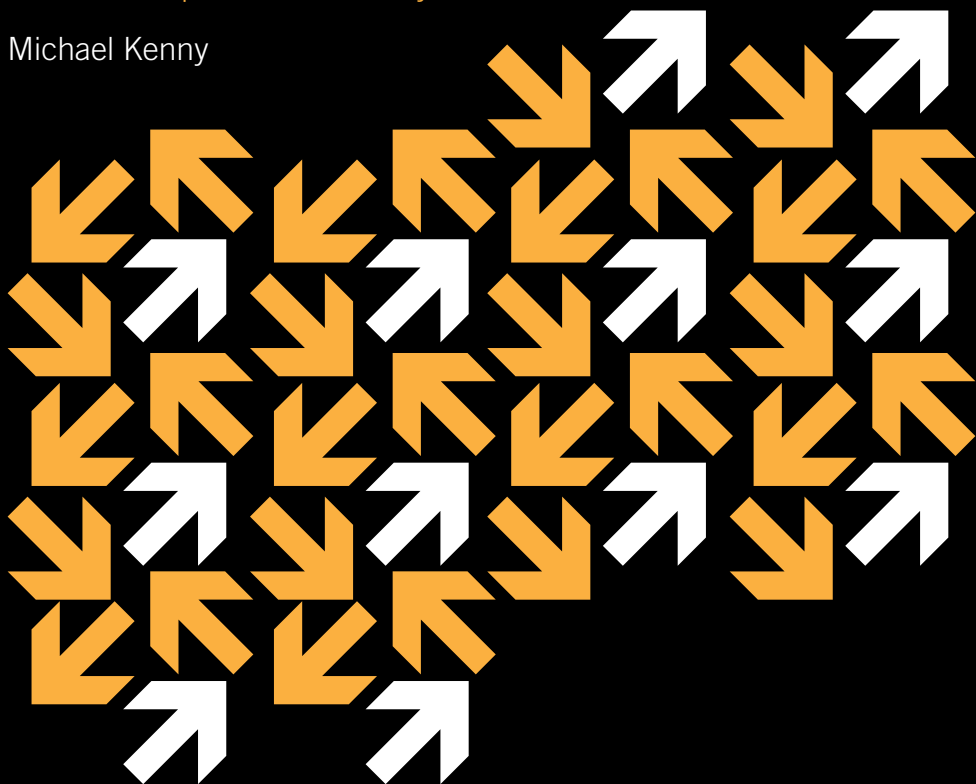


# Developing a Civic Approach to Public Services

Time to take pluralism seriously

Michael Kenny



**2020 Public Services Trust**  
*at the* RSA

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**The 2020 Public Services Trust** is a registered charity (no. 1124095), based at the RSA. It is not aligned with any political party and operates with independence and impartiality. The Trust exists to stimulate deeper understanding of the challenges facing public services in the medium term. Through research, inquiry and discourse, it aims to develop rigorous and practical solutions, capable of sustaining support across all political parties.

In December 2008, the Trust launched a major new **Commission on 2020 Public Services**, chaired by Sir Andrew Foster, to recommend the characteristics of a new public services settlement appropriate for the future needs and aspirations of citizens, and the best practical arrangements for its implementation.

For more information on the Trust and its Commission, please visit [www.2020pst.org](http://www.2020pst.org).

The views expressed in this report are those of the author and do not represent the opinion of the Trust or the Commission.

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# Introduction to this series

The Commission on 2020 Public Services is a major inquiry into how public services should respond to the significant societal challenges of the next decade. The Commission is developing a practical and compelling vision of the priorities for public action to address the emergent challenges facing society in 2020. The Commission has three aims:

- 1** To broaden the terms of the debate about the future of public services in the UK.
- 2** To articulate a positive and long-term vision for public services.
- 3** To build a coalition for change.

This series of essays represents a working partnership between the 2020 Commission and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). As part of our commitment to rigorous, evidence-based research, we jointly commissioned a series of experts to examine the key issues in public services. Two broad themes emerged: one considering future relationships between citizens, state and society; the other exploring the future delivery of public services.

Generous support from the ESRC has allowed the Commission to dig deep into a complex set of issues, and ensure its inquiry represents the best contemporary thinking on public services and society, with a strong evidence base.

Each paper can be read separately, and will also be available as a collected volume in the future. We believe that the research and analysis emerging from this partnership is a rich and significant contribution both to the ongoing national debate on public services and to the Commission's vision for the future. We hope that you enjoy the series, and we invite you to share your own reflections and analysis at [www.2020pst.org](http://www.2020pst.org).

# Foreword

At one point in this thoughtful paper, Professor Michael Kenny asks: ‘Surely now it is time that we start to debate afresh what other models of citizenship we ought to cherish?’ This is not only a debate for the abstract or the philosophical, but one we should be conducting right at the centre of public policy. The history of public services in the UK is also a history of evolving narratives of citizenship – from T.H. Marshall’s utopian model of public services as the expression of social solidarity, to today’s pragmatic mix of consumerism, universalism and rational individualism.

Beneath the terminology, our notions of citizenship are about the basis upon which we make decisions, what we provide for ourselves and for each other, and what the balance is between the rights and responsibilities in our lives. The negotiation of these issues has shaped the public services we currently have; and these negotiations will need to be re-opened as we re-design public services for the twenty-first century.

As Professor Kenny notes, many of the societal challenges ahead could not have been foreseen by William Beveridge in the 1940s. New technologies are transforming our social landscape, our population is changing demographically, and the expectations, needs and aspirations of citizens are constantly evolving. Against this backdrop, how can we hope to re-think public services without first examining the assumptions and behaviour upon which they are based?

This paper is an attempt to do just that, arguing that our notions of citizenship should not be fixed – neither totally ‘rational’, nor inevitably ‘social’ – but should instead be based on something more plural, that recognises the ‘existence and interplay of different civic ideals in our culture’. As we move to a political context in which the agency of citizens and communities is being encouraged as part of a ‘big society’, these observations are worth paying attention to. If our assumptions about citizen capacity and motivation are myopic, then attempts to engage them in the design and delivery of their public services will fail.

Over the last two years, the 2020 Public Services Trust has been deliberating over the basis of a new model for public services. We will publish a final report and

recommendations in September 2010 after a major research programme and a great deal of engagement with citizens and professionals. At the heart of our efforts has been the idea of getting 'above' existing services – starting a debate that asks what people want, need and value in life, and how public services could be built afresh around these ideals. How we understand citizenship within this context could not be more important.

Henry Kippin

2020 Public Services Trust, July 2010



# Developing a Civic Approach to Public Services

## Introduction

The Commission organised by the 2020 Public Services Trust has been forthright in its insistence that fostering a new politics of citizenship should be one of the animating principles informing our thinking about public services (2020 Public Services Trust 2010). And various commentators have argued persuasively that in order to build such a politics, we should consider recent findings from the behavioural sciences. In this paper, I argue that we might also profit from looking backwards – towards a rich body of thinking about citizenship that remains influential upon public attitudes, and replete with insights pertinent to our current dilemmas.

The idea of approaching public services from the vantage-point of citizenship chimes with the broad shift in the policy community away from the idea that public provision should be determined either through the rule-bound approach to need associated with large bureaucracies, or from an overarching commitment to individual choice. We need powerful new governing principles to enable policy-makers to bring the public with them as they steer through the difficult challenges that lie ahead. These include the immediate need to make decisions about priorities in the context of significant reductions in public spending, as well as the longer term challenge posed by a clutch of problems that Beveridge could not have foreseen, including growing social isolation, mental illness and climate change.

## The Rise of the Assertive Citizen?

Despite the existence of a large body of data documenting the fluid character of the public's expectations of public services (see for instance <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/sir/index.shtml>; Needham 2007, pp.170-80), a good deal of policy and academic thinking in this area has fallen in line behind a rather one-dimensional

and over-stated account of what makes today's citizens tick. The notion that we are far less likely to be bound by the dictates of tradition, more loosely attuned to the ties of community, and increasingly characterised by what Anthony Giddens (1991) termed a propensity for 'reflexivity' – the willingness to make our own decisions and calculate the risks attached to different courses of behaviour – was a key feature of New Labour's thinking about the changes it wanted to make in several key areas of public service provision. Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (2001) characterised this new breed of citizens as products of a deep-rooted process of 'individualisation'. This is said to have rendered us increasingly responsible for decision-making in areas of our lives that were once governed by convention, tradition or the rule of experts.

An important implication of such accounts is that we are now 'individualistic and assertive in our outlook, both in our use of the public services and in our private consumption' (Griffiths, Foley and Prendergast 2009, p.115). But how plausible is the characterisation of the assertive citizen? One reason for scepticism is the tendency of this narrative to conceive the attributes of the 'consumer-citizen' as the complete antithesis of his more deferential and communally-minded predecessors. This kind of 'fresh page' (Sennett 2006) approach to the complexities of societal change is almost guaranteed to fall prey to hyperbole. It may also have resulted in public service reformers being cut off from the insights and wisdom associated with previous eras, because these were assumed to be dated and irrelevant, rather than connected to, and informing, the current situation. The focus here upon the persistence of ethical perspectives developed in earlier periods is intended as a counterpoint to such an approach.

A number of factors are commonly thought to explain the rise of the new individualism. These include: the impact of improving living standards; greater access to educational opportunities; the implications of successive waves of technological innovation; significant changes in the nature and culture of work; and the decline of deference (Prabhakar 2006, p.3). There is no doubt that these factors have, singly and in combination, had major effects upon the public institutions and culture of Britain. But it is just as plausible to believe that these have resulted in a deepening and re-making of communal bonds and attachments, as much as they have detached individuals from them. Assertive individualism appears much less distributed among many poorer and BEM communities than it does among the relatively affluent and highly educated (Griffiths, Foley and Prendergast 2009).

Research also suggests that the dissemination of consumerism can increase forms of passivity and dependency for many people, not signal their emancipation from custom or convention (James 2007).

In policy terms, the most significant inference drawn from this account has been the conviction that older forms of public provision based upon the model of the post-war welfare state were made redundant by the rising expectations and dynamism of the era of individualism. Public service reform was shaped around the idea that a brand-new ethos is needed to inform the design and delivery of services for today's citizens. Policies were developed to create new opportunities for individual self-assertion, particularly through the introduction of quasi-markets in order to ensure a diversity of providers. Choice emerged as the central value within the account of public service reform assembled by New Labour (Needham 2007), especially after 2001, and remains a key motif for the policy community. This commitment brought together two different emphases – the drive towards the provision of a set of standardised entitlements and rights, on the one hand, and a growing recognition of the merits of more differentiated form of provision reflecting the diversity of individual preferences, on the other.

In the last few years, the centrality of choice, the rather variable consequences of its introduction, and the limited manner in which it was sometimes instituted (for instance in specialist healthcare where a genuine diversity of provision has been hard to stimulate), have resulted in a waning of faith in the choice-based narrative. Conservative politicians and thinkers were among the most perceptive critics of the over-emphasis upon choice. Yet it has emerged yet again as the central motif of the radical reforms of the NHS proposed by the current Coalition government.

This is despite the existence of a growing body of evidence about the failure of choice to resonate with the values that animate people in society. An important finding from a recent qualitative study of people's perceptions of public services is that choice-centred frameworks are at odds with how citizens – assertive or otherwise – think about public goods. People do not on the whole see themselves as akin to retail customers, even if they do want services that are responsive, supportive and enabling (Clarke et al. 2007). "It's not like shopping" was the refrain these researchers encountered in several of their focus groups. When asked for their views on health care, many participants contrasted their ongoing relationship with providers, such as their GP, with the anonymity and discontinuity they experienced as consumers. The quality of the interaction with GP, policewoman or teacher

carries a unique value in many people's perception of what distinguishes a publicly provided service. This research also found that people cherished feeling part of a larger community that is entitled to use community-wide benefits.

The focus upon choice has until recently diverted attention from a recognition of the multiplicity of points where collective agency from below can be exercised and tapped within the system of public services, including on issues of ownership, governance, relationships with practitioners, and campaigns for greater transparency and accountability. This broader policy canvas emerges more clearly if we attune ourselves to the uneven and variable spread of the new individualism, and observe the continuing hold of a set of long-standing ideas about what citizenship means. There are important traces of republican and welfarist ideas still in circulation, each sustaining contending ideas about the public interest and the role of state and citizens. The continuing pull of values associated with each is an important influence upon the contradictory character of our thinking upon public goods and their provision.

## Reconsidering classical-liberal citizenship

The question of how we conceive the relationship between the pursuit of individual self-interest and the requirements of a civic culture is one of the central preoccupations of western political thought. An important strand of modern thinking, which I sketch below under the heading classical liberal citizenship, has long argued that the pursuit of instrumental interests by individuals can, under the right conditions, incline individuals towards a more civic disposition.

This way of thinking underpinned many of the intellectual and legal achievements of liberalism in the nineteenth century (Taylor 1995), and has left a major imprint upon Britain's political culture and society. Thinkers within this lineage tended to regard the pursuit of self-interest as sometimes compatible with the development of the ethos of citizenship, but as also in need of supplementing by the public provision of collective goods like roads, street lighting or education. Adam Smith (2008) provided a seminal account of how the development of the division of labour and participation in the market promote chains of inter-dependency and forms of mutual understanding that can cultivate the moral dispositions that citizenship requires. The capacity of the market to engender a disposition for 'sympathy' between individuals involved in economic transactions was, in his view, one of the key attributes of a civic ethos.

There is a strong family resemblance between the consumer-citizen thesis and this tradition of conceiving citizenship as both a fortunate by-product of the pursuit of individual interests and a much needed supplement to instrumental behaviour. The doctrine of market failure, which was central to New Labour's thinking about public provision, provides a strong echo of these earlier perspectives. An important challenge we can derive from Smith, Mill and others in this lineage centres upon the question of whether the actions of self-interested individuals can, in certain conditions, help promote a civic disposition. In contemporary terms, this requires us to consider whether it is possible to connect people's identities as consumers with their capacities as citizens. After two decades of watching the effects and power of consumerism, our answer to this should surely be: "sometimes, yes, but all the time, no".

There is considerable promise in a policy focus upon forms of provision that can create virtuous circles between instrumental benefits for individuals and communities, on the one hand, and public goods, on the other. Yet, the experience of the last two decades provides considerable evidence that the civic culture does not benefit from either free markets or the bossy state (Marquand 2004). Different commentators have pointed to the decline of public spiritedness, the diminution of the social fabric and the waning of trust in this period when the classical liberal approach to public provision has been dominant (Halpern 2004). Surely now it is time that we start to debate afresh what other models of citizenship we ought to cherish?

## Citizenship as welfare

Classical liberal citizenship has been developed alongside rival bodies of thinking over the last two centuries. In the course of the twentieth, it was subjected to a major challenge from the idea that the state has a special obligation to act on behalf of the whole community to protect its most vulnerable members, and to promote the welfare of all. It was the state's duty to underwrite citizens against pressing forms of risk, such as unemployment or ill health, and to equip people with the basic capacities, including education, to act as equal citizens.

While this outlook undoubtedly invested the vertical relationship between citizen and state with considerable significance, it also promoted a powerful account of the horizontal ties between citizens. These were endowed with considerable moral importance by a host of social liberals and ethical socialists in the early twentieth

century. The public realm came to be conceived as the repository of the ideals of disinterested public service, social reciprocity and a commitment to designing enduring collectivist solutions to pressing social challenges.

This might broadly be termed the welfarist conception of citizenship (Freeden 2005, pp.60-77). Figures such as Leonard Hobhouse, J.A. Hobson and T.H. Marshall helped engineer a profound sea-change in political attitudes towards the new social problems associated with industrialisation, such as urban poverty (Freeden 1978), and contributed to a public service ethos in which powerful professional groups – doctors, lawyers, teachers and civil servants – would be trained and trusted to dispense social goods on behalf of the state (Marquand 2004).

Clearly, some aspects of this broad perspective have waned in power over time, not least because of the attacks launched upon them by the new left and new right currents of the 1970s and 1980s. Yet the public service ethos continues to pervade some parts of government in Britain and our social culture more generally. An important question facing policy-makers now is whether this ethos should be sustained, and even revived, in areas where the promotion of self-interest and choice, have palpably failed. A rekindled sense of public service might represent an important means of motivating and attracting civil servants and Town Hall employees when rates of pay are frozen or even in decline. It may also need to be given greater accent within a reformed NHS, when the shift to making GPs responsible for commissioning and budgets could shift their relationship with patients down a more instrumental path.

## Citizenship as self-government

Traces of other traditions of civic thinking have also survived into the present. Another that has waned in significance since the eighteenth century (Pocock 1975), has been revived more recently. This is the broad lineage of republican thinking that has survived alongside, and usually in opposition to, the classical liberal conception outlined above (Pettit 1999). This perspective has developed around two key propositions. Individuals are free in so far as they are not subject to the exercise of arbitrary forms of power over their lives and choices. And, learning to be good citizen requires first-hand experience of forms of social activity, including education, that inculcate an appreciation of the public good. The value of self-government emerges as a foundational commitment for a free state and strong society throughout this lineage (Skinner 1999).

These ideas have, as David Marquand (2008) notes, enjoyed a more marginal place within Britain's political culture in the twentieth century. But they have nevertheless been sources of influence and inspiration for many different movements and politicians. In recent years, republicanism has come to overlap with, and be challenged by, a renewed focus upon the ethical and sociological significance of community, with thinkers like Michael Sandel (1982) rejecting the classical liberal account of the asocial character of the self, and the procedural approach to justice favoured by Anglo-American liberal theory. Communitarians have played an important role in providing the intellectual underpinnings for a marked shift in policy thinking towards the virtues of forms of solidarity and identity at the local level (White and Leighton 2008).

The republican ideal could have an important role to play within the current policy landscape. Its central emphasis upon the role of the state in equipping citizens to assume greater responsibility within the public realm is an important counter to the mistaken assumption that the Big Society will automatically arise as the bossy state is pushed back. If public goods such as safer streets and more healthy living come to be regarded as the joint responsibility of government and citizen, an important new policy direction can open up. In this spirit Ben Rogers has recently made the case for equipping a range of community stakeholders with the skills required to tackle anti-social behaviour (2010). The notion of a National Civic Service would, in a republican vein, be re-conceived away from the model of military conscription, and developed as a locally co-ordinated and co-produced expansion of voluntary endeavour, with schemes and initiatives instigated and designed by local schools and colleges. More generally a renewed republican ethos could well permit politicians to talk in a different way to the public about the unavoidable trade-offs and compromises that major reductions in spending require (Crick 1962).

## Interpreting contemporary social attitudes toward public services

These traditions represent an important background influence upon the shifting, and apparently contradictory, preferences which the public exhibit towards public services. A recent survey by Ipsos MORI (2010) points to the prevalence of the belief that public services should be distributed fairly. Fairness here seems to involve equality *and* uniformity of access. It renders unpopular the idea that services may vary in different localities, especially in healthcare or education. Over 70%

of respondents to this survey think that treatments should only be available on the NHS if they are available to everyone, regardless of where they live. And it suggests very little public appetite for varying the provision of essential services or entitlements according to individuals' behaviour.

A strong commitment to the notion of services as the source of benefits for all pervades public attitudes today. This poll (Ipsos MORI 2010) found that about half of all respondents believe that the Government's top priority should be what is good for everyone in society as a whole, while less than a third believe that it should be the amount of tax people have to pay. Most people are even willing to trade off service quality against this commitment to the opportunity for everyone to benefit equally.

The collectivist emphasis upon the right of everybody to equal levels of support runs together with a strong resistance to the idea of our fellow citizens accessing more benefits than we are entitled to receive ourselves. Echoing the findings of other polls, such as the most recent British Social Attitudes survey (Curtice 2010), Ipsos MORI find that most respondents are unsympathetic to the unequal outcomes and life chances experienced by people from different social backgrounds. Most are accordingly sceptical about the idea of targeting resources on the most disadvantaged.

It also finds that people are generally hostile to any increase in direct taxation to fund the levels of service provision implied by their own preferences, seeing these as a fundamental constraint upon their economic liberty. The survey does however hint at a latent interest in more self-government. It detects significant minority support for greater local control – a stance that people recognise is likely to lead to considerable variation in service provision.

How should we interpret these findings? What do they say about the divergent thinking about citizenship which is latent within our social culture?

The commitment to fairness as uniformity of provision betrays the continuing imprint of British welfarism, with its emphasis upon key services being free and universally available at the point of use. This expectation may carry the kind of passive connotation which proponents of assertive citizenship regard as outdated. But it also signals a new kind of collective consumerism, framing social benefits as jealously guarded individual entitlements, not expressions of the reciprocal relations and ties of a shared community with our fellow citizens. This attitude is manifest too in the entrenched resistance to the prospect of bearing any further costs for public



services. This stance betrays the lingering impact in Britain of a broadly classical liberal understanding of public goods, with individual citizens placing their own interests above the idea of making contributions in the public interest.

The third of the values observed above – the desire signalled by a significant minority to be more involved in the development and delivery of services and an interest in greater local control, may suggest a latent support for democratic-republican values. Whether this is sufficiently robust or widespread to suggest that a more positive response may emerge from below to the entreaties of politicians for people to take more responsibility for public goods, such as better health or safer streets, is hard to judge. Polling undertaken by the Institute for Public Policy Research and PricewaterhouseCoopers suggests some support for this contention in relation to crime and anti-social behaviour, with 82% of respondents supporting the idea of greater public involvement in these areas. But it also reports considerable variation across the issue-areas lumped together under the heading ‘public services’. The response was significantly lower, for instance, when the question was put in terms of the use of personal budgets for social care, which gained the support of only 53% of the sample, and the idea of parents setting up new schools, favoured by only 41% (ippr/pwc 2010, p.22).

This survey also reveals the embedded nature of the popular perception that the state alone is responsible for their management and delivery of services. It signals considerable resistance, at least at the level of principle, to the notion that responsibility for public goods should be pooled with individuals, families or communities. Thus, while 82% agreed that individuals and communities should do more to help the police tackle crime and anti-social behaviour, only 3% felt that they themselves should be deemed responsible for ensuring that their streets were a safe place to live. 41% favoured allowing parents to set up schools but only 2% reported that they believed that individuals should be primarily responsible for running them, compared to 93% who saw this as the state’s duty. Most strikingly of all, 76% agreed that ‘individuals today are less willing to take personal responsibility over the issues that affect their own lives’.

The issue of responsibility appears to represent the strongest redoubt against ideas and initiatives framed around the goal of increasing public participation and involvement in public services. It is important to recognise that this sentiment is fuelled by a distinctive mixture of old-style welfarism, which frames the state as the ethical agent acting on behalf of society, and a powerful new culture of

instrumentalism, which represents a significant inhibition upon collective action. This latter sentiment is perhaps the main reason for the divergence noted by different polls between people's willingness to indicate their support in principle for greater involvement in services but disinclination in practice to commit their own personal time and resources. A recent survey reported that while people in London indicated strong support for community partnerships (with 82% indicating support for expanding the scheme), they were significantly less likely to get involved themselves (26% said they would be interested in doing so), and follow-up research showed that only 2% actually did (ippr/pwc 2010, p.10).

The apparent waning of the disposition to commit to civic initiatives is one reason why some politicians have leaped with gusto upon the idea of 'Nudge' propounded by Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein (2008) and other behavioural economists. Their focus upon the expert manipulation of the environment in which individual choices are made, appeals both because of its apparently realistic tailoring to the culture of instrumentalism, and since it offers politicians technocratic means of evading the complexities and obduracy of public opinion. Interesting and potentially innovative as some of the initiatives it has promoted may be – for instance the new Personal Accounts system for pensions which will make 'opting in' the default position – 'Nudge' represents a tactical retreat, not a new pathway, from a civic perspective. The contradictory character of public perceptions needs to be engaged and challenged, not bypassed through clever policy design. 'Nudge' backs off from the task of re-animating a civic perspective in contemporary culture. The implications of this latter project become more apparent if we consider a number of recent attempts to promote different kinds of user involvement and control in various service areas.

## Towards a more participatory approach to public services?

As suggested earlier, there are many different 'pressure points' within public services where an enhanced sense of agency, power and partnership might be fostered, and a new sense of public spirit promoted. There has, for instance, been recognition of late by both main parties of the civic potential associated with diversifying the ownership of public assets. This thinking deploys the liberal tradition's insight into the moral benefits of asset ownership, and concern with the distribution of property throughout society.

Other recent initiatives also seem more promising than the promotion of choice or use of nudges as ways of tapping into latent forms of civic idealism. This is true,

for example, of the growing emphasis upon the merits of 'co-production' (Boyle and Harris 2009). This approach is typically justified in terms of the improved service outcomes it can deliver for citizens and the potential benefits for government, if it can harness 'the hidden wealth of nations' (Halpern 2010) – including the time, energy, networks, knowledge and skills that individuals bring with them (Young Foundation 2009).

But co-production can also tap into the subterranean streams of civic endeavour and commitment that flow, often out of sight, through many different communities in Britain. The Government's citizenship survey, for instance, shows that the percentage of people who feel they 'belong strongly to their neighbourhood' has increased from 70% in 2003 to 77% in 2008-09. Rates of volunteering have also remained steady over the decade, with a quarter of people doing this on a formal basis at least once a month (CLG 2009). And, as yet, both volunteering and charitable giving have increased since the onset of the recession (Institute for Volunteering Research 2009). Wrongly seen by some as a brand-new model, co-production is more accurately viewed as a reflection of the reality that '... outcomes are co-produced by the interaction of governance, services and citizens' (Brooks 2007, p.6). Reform guided by this model can build upon some important and long-established forms of networking and association, both at the micro-levels – the street, the neighbourhood and the estate and at grander scales, through the practice of local authorities, third sector bodies and voluntary organisations.

But co-production faces some difficult challenges before it can be regarded as a generalisable approach to public service reform. The inequitable distribution of resources, time and skills within and between communities is a significant obstacle to any approach that rewards or requires greater community involvement. But it is time that co-production was given its place within the contemporary policy repertoire.

So, measures like giving budgets to individual users of social care services may be appropriate where individuals have highly differentiated needs and are likely, with appropriate information and support, to make good decisions about their own interests. But when it comes to crime reduction or issues affecting a local school, there is a strong case for encouraging individuals to come together to figure out and work through different perspectives about what are the best interests of the community. There remains considerable scope for relatively inexpensive forms of participatory innovation in fields such as community justice, parental involvement

in schools and local asset management. These kinds of initiative are important in their own right, and as kernels for further civic growth.

Government should commit to making available to local authorities a contestable funding stream to support small-scale initiatives of this kind. Keeping alive these sources of experiment and civic resilience is all the more important in the austere circumstances facing the public sector over the next few years.

We should pay particular attention to those innovations that establish a virtuous circle linking instrumental goals – a reduction in crime in a particular geographical area – and the achievement of civic effects – people on an estate coming to know each other better. A relatively low cost, but highly effective, instance of this kind of circle is the ‘walking bus’ phenomenon, in which parents arrange to share responsibility for walking children in a particular neighbourhood to school.

But we should acknowledge too that the emergence on the contemporary policy agenda of a cluster of difficult social issues, like funding for social care, pension reform or University tuition fees, point towards the fiscal burden falling very unevenly upon different social groups and age cohorts. As significant reductions in public spending are made, there is an overwhelming need to engage the public about the impossibility of maintaining core services without greater costs, either through rising taxes, the introduction of co-payment for some services, or invitations to provide voluntary labour (for instance to keep local libraries open when their funding is cut). Across a whole range of social issues and policy areas, politicians need to retrieve and project a much stronger sense of the public interest. This is vital as well if they are to succeed in persuading individuals to adopt new social habits – such as saving or eating healthily – that will generate considerable social and fiscal benefits in years to come. In such circumstances, frameworks that seek merely to ‘go with the grain’ of instrumental individualism are unlikely to prove long-lasting in their benefits.

Problems such as social care funding and climate change require a robust policy response at a UK-wide level. They might also be fruitfully addressed at smaller scales too – the region, locality or neighbourhood. Ipsos MORI’s (2010) finding that ‘people tend to be much more positive about local services than they are about how services are run nationally’ suggests that people identify more readily with the dilemmas and contributions of public services at a more human scale. It finds that the public is generally more positive about local services than about services delivered nationally, more likely to feel that they can have a say in how local services operate and more disposed to feel positively about their locale if they feel

able to affect its decision making. Does 'the local' represent the seedbed where a sense of public spiritedness and civic pride can be re-grown? Certainly, the case for a national civic service which has lately been revived would be more resonant if conceived as a funded programme directed by local authorities towards pressing areas of local need.

Before wholly endorsing the localist case for civic renewal, however, we should recall the very low rate of participation in local elections, and the impact of the forces of apathy and indifference that are undermining local public life as well as national politics. There are good reasons to think that an emphasis upon 'the local' is necessary, but not sufficient, in relation to civic virtue. This is because the contemporary demand for welfare and security, the desire for more opportunities for self-government, and the interest in a renewed sense of reciprocity, are bound to spill beyond the boundaries associated with the locality. These resonant values point instead toward a civically inclined politics that seeks to change the relationship between locality and centre, not to promote the sovereignty of one over the other. The devolution of significant decision-making and budgetary powers, promised by all the main parties, but as yet delivered by none, is bound to require a robust centre. This will be needed to oversee local authority performance, as well as forms of accountability and redress, and to take the strategic decisions that local government cannot (Kippin 2010).

This observation points to the potential significance, from a civic perspective, of forms of social mobilisation and interaction that span the local and national scales. Some in the political world have landed upon the idea of giving the third sector a much expanded role in service delivery – an ambition for which many organisations in this sector may not however be ideally equipped. My argument points instead to an appreciation of their capacities to provide a shared voice, foster new spaces and promote awareness of issues in the space between citizen and government.

In some areas, notably healthcare, there are some interesting indications that interest-focused networks and associations are enabling new forms of responsibility-sharing. Several successful self-care programmes have trained and supported patients with chronic conditions to manage their own care. The Expert Patient programme skills those with a particular condition to advise and provide first-hand support. This development taps into the flourishing of on-line communities around different medical conditions. This model is proliferating in other sectors too. The Citizens Advice Bureau's ROTA project, for instance, successfully trains

prisoners to support fellow prisoners (NEF 2008, pp.8-10; Halpern, Bates, Beales and Heahfield 2004).

## Concluding thoughts

This essay has focused on the limitations of the idea of the 'assertive citizen', and drawn attention to its foundational role in shaping New Labour's thinking about public service reform, and its current influence within parts of the Coalition government's public service reform agenda. Such an emphasis, and more recent arguments about the importance of nudging citizens towards pro-social behaviour, are unlikely to support the kind of policy framework required to tackle the biggest social challenges facing Britain. These approaches tend to hang back from the project of renewing the frayed civic culture.

The key debates about what factors are likely to motivate us to act as citizens, prompted by research across the behavioural sciences, should be supplemented by a reappraisal of earlier bodies of political thinking. These have generated important reflections about what it means to adopt the viewpoint of a citizen, rather than a self-interested individual, and how we can be encouraged to do so. These older ideas about citizenship also continue to resonate in contemporary public attitudes. They provide important resources into which policy-makers can tap. They also represent significant constraints upon those attempting sweeping public service reforms.

My central argument is that, in a context when the deficiencies of the classical liberal approach to citizenship are ever more apparent, those committed to developing public services that are more resilient, democratic and responsive, as well as cost-efficient, need to start fleshing out a civic perspective pertinent for our times. This major enterprise is likely to involve a mixture of tasks, including: the posing of important questions about our motivations and capacities; the articulation of powerful collective aspirations; and the development of a critical yardstick with which to evaluate policy proposals and initiatives. One of the challenges facing those committed to fashioning such a perspective is the existence and interplay of different civic ideals in our culture – a phenomenon that has been rather overlooked in the policy world. These traditions tend to pull public attitudes in different directions on such questions as: whether health services provided by public organisations should be given preference over private sector contractors; whether the public should assume more responsibility for the provision and design of services; and whether a system that passed more powers to the locality,

hence generating very different priorities and outcomes, could over time become regarded as legitimate.

As well as helping us understand the different impulses behind current social attitudes, a serious engagement with the moral pluralism that shapes our understanding of citizenship would provide us with invaluable resources and insights as we seek to build the kind of attitudinal consensus that will be required if we are, by 2020, to establish a social settlement that really is 'beyond Beveridge'.

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