

VOLUNTEERING AND PUBLIC SERVICES

**Where co-production meets
localism**

PAUL BUDDERY | OCTOBER 2015

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RSA
Action and Research Centre

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About the RSA

The RSA (Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce) believes that everyone should have the freedom and power to turn their ideas into reality – we call this the Power to Create. Through our ideas, research and 27,000-strong Fellowship, we seek to realise a society where creative power is distributed, where concentrations of power are confronted, and where creative values are nurtured.

About this paper

This is the first paper of our People Shaped Localism programme – a series of events and reports looking at how localism can enable a shift in power to people and communities. As devolution and austerity begin to shift the structures of local government and local services, how can we ensure that power moves to people, rather than simply stays with institutions under new management?

We start with volunteering because we believe that localism should start with the citizen and the community, and from the assumption that people can be active in meeting their needs and achieving their aspirations. The RSA believes that this individual and collective problem solving capability – what we term our ‘Power to Create’ – is fundamentally important in tackling all of society’s biggest challenges, including how we organise a collective life that represents our values.¹

Citizens in resilient communities are able and willing to share resources, including help and support. Public services should be designed to encourage these exchanges, and this can be done most successfully at a local level. Realistic resourcing, planning for equity, and willingness to allow for genuine power shift through co-production will all be essential; but where these conditions are met, greater public service volunteering could become the foundation of a localism that values and reinforces our mutual connectedness.

Key questions touched on in this paper, but not fully developed, include institutional form and accountability, the power of local identity and new opportunities for dialogue between communities, civil society and local government. These will be discussed more fully through other events and publications in the People Shaped Localism programme. Other work by the RSA’s Public Services and Communities team to be published this year looks more closely at social capital and community development.

This paper builds on insights shared at a roundtable held at the RSA in June 2015. A full list of those who participated is given at the back of the report. We would particularly like to thank the following people for their support before and during the event, and their feedback to drafts of this report:

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1. Lent, A. (2014) ‘All hell is breaking loose as mass creativity becomes the defining feature of this century’: <http://www.rsablogs.org.uk/2014/adam-lent/hell-breaking-loose-mass-creativity-defining-feature-century/>; Taylor, M. (2014) ‘On the Power to Create’: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IzgipuFGb_8

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Paul Buddery, Deputy Director, Public Services and Communities

Atif Shafique, Researcher, Public Services and Communities

1. The rise of public service volunteering: why an unexpected transformation needs a public debate

Local authorities across the country are encouraging volunteering and enlisting volunteers as a way of making communities 'stronger'

In 2006 the Commission on the Future of Volunteering began its work with a fair wind. The economy was growing, as was public sector employment, and 2005's Year of the Volunteer had shone a positive light on the value of volunteers. The optimistic spirit of the times comes through strongly in the Commission's final report, published in January 2008. But a month later, Northern Rock collapsed and our political economy took a new course.

On the other side of the Great Recession, the hope that volunteering would become 'part of the DNA of our society'² has indeed started to be realised, but in a form that Baroness Neuberger and her colleagues on the Commission could hardly have predicted. They had been positive but cautious about the relationship between volunteering and public services, emphasising the need to avoid job substitution and maintain quality through training and management.

Today, public service delivery strategies at local and national level rely explicitly on volunteering. Its DNA has become part of their survival plan. For example, Simon Stevens' Five Year Forward View for the NHS locates much of the energy for sustainable health and social care systems in volunteers. Local authorities across the country are encouraging volunteering and enlisting volunteers as a way of making communities 'stronger' and better able to support themselves as traditional interventions by professional services become difficult to maintain. Austerity has pushed volunteer involvement in public services out of the wings, onto centre stage, and into the spotlight.

Of course, volunteering has been part and parcel of public service delivery for years. Elements of our public services have always been volunteer delivered (such as the magistracy)³ and outright opposition

2. Neuberger, J. (2008) *Report of the Commission on the future of volunteering and manifesto for change*. Volunteering England.

3. IPSOS MORI (revised 2013) *The strengths and skills of the judiciary in the magistrates' courts*. Ministry of Justice.

to volunteer involvement in many other services faded long ago. It is over 40 years since a health union passed motions aimed at barring volunteers from hospitals.⁴ The Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR) is currently developing a typology for the wide range of roles that could be termed public service delivery volunteering, and is reviewing the numbers of people involved – which are huge, but seldom discussed.⁵ In policing alone, for example, there are 17,000 Special Constables, 173,000 Neighbourhood Co-ordinators and 6,500 volunteer Police Cadets. When the Whole Essex Community Budget programme reviewed volunteering across 30 local public sector organisations in 2013, it identified 56 types of roles, ranging from salt bag schemes to pets as hospital therapy, to roles on Local Safeguarding Children’s Boards.⁶

Notwithstanding this recent growth in numbers and policy visibility, the role of volunteering in delivering public service outcomes is contentious. This may go some way to explaining the reluctance on the part of successive governments to emphasise it when setting out their visions. New Labour tended to laud volunteering as an extension of social and political inclusion. The Conservative-led coalition encouraged volunteering as an expression of Big Society responsibility, and a corrective to the bureaucratic state. Neither integrated it fully with their account of how public services should operate (the latter’s Open Public Services agenda went some way to doing so, but was focused on market contestability; it was more interested in the voluntary sector than volunteering per se).⁷

One consequence of this diffidence has been a dislocation between service by service innovation on the ground, and a wider public and policy debate still encumbered by patronising and unduly hesitant attitudes: volunteering is amateur, a sticking plaster, a danger to collective principles and public commitment; and even more damagingly (because it draws the wrong conclusions from important truths) volunteering is an activity so diverse and subjective in its forms and drivers that extreme care should be taken not to kill it with formalism. Public service volunteering has yet to be treated with the same rigour as other aspects of service design and strategic planning.

The RSA believes that the changes that are underway call for a more open political discussion of upside opportunities and downside risks. We believe that by expanding formal and informal volunteering, local public services have a positive opportunity to promote wellbeing and social value, move resources towards prevention, and re-design services to be more inclusive, collaborative and accountable to their communities and service users. But the risks are real.

4. Finnegan, A. and Brewis, G. (2012) *The Volunteering England archive: an overview and historical background*. LSE.

5. Hill, M. (June 2015) ‘Volunteers who deliver: how many are involved in public service delivery?’ <http://blogs.ncvo.org.uk/2015/06/03/volunteers-who-deliver-how-many-are-involved-in-public-service-delivery/>

6. Essex public sector volunteering September 2013: <http://www.wecb.org.uk/group/147/files>

7. Cameron, D. (14 February 2011) Speech on the Big Society: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pms-speech-on-big-society>

Designing-in austerity? The risks of public service volunteering

Volunteering, like the sector which bears its name and channels most of its activity, plays a risky game when it gets close to the state

There are good reasons to be wary about volunteering's growing importance in public services – where the charge is that it is bad for services (colluding in their impoverishment as budgets are slashed) and bad for volunteering itself (engaging us in our own regulation and subordination – a prime instance of what Foucault termed 'governmentality'⁸ – whereas volunteering should be freely chosen and an opportunity for dissent). Volunteering, like the sector which bears its name and channels most of its activity, plays a risky game when it gets close to the state. The rise of public service volunteering can be seen as the logical but lamentable conclusion of a long retreat from volunteering's independent roots, where institutional distinctness safeguards distinctness of mission and values. The voluntary sector has wrestled on the one hand with its wish to play a greater role in society, and on the other hand with the risk of being maneuvered into a role written for it by government. The sector's critical distance from government has been called into question and critics have accused it of reproducing the institutional structures to which it should be providing an alternative.⁹ By this account, neo-liberal alchemy is transforming the essence of altruistic voluntary action – its freedom – into conscripted service.¹⁰

If the transformation of values is arguable, and the space for many different types of volunteering actually remains considerable – including, as we will suggest, in new forms of public service volunteering – the impact of increased public service volunteering on staffing in the current financial climate is tangible. National and local compacts and volunteering strategies have consistently stated that volunteers will not substitute for or displace paid public service staff, but it is at best difficult, and at worst logically impossible to see how this principle can be maintained

8. For an accessible account of the concept, see Sokhi-Bulley, B. (2014) 'Governmentality: notes on the thought of Michel Foucault', *Critical Legal Thinking*: <http://criticallegalthinking.com/2014/12/02/governmentality-notes-thought-michel-foucault/>

9. For a rounded discussion of these issues in relation to volunteering, see the VM Blog (2012) 'When volunteering becomes an institution'. Association of Volunteer Managers: <http://volunteermanagers.org.uk/2012/01/07/when-volunteering-becomes-an-institution/>; for broader accounts of the threat to voluntary sector independence see National Coalition for Independent Action (2015) *Fight or Fright – Voluntary Services in 2015*. NCIA; Independence Panel (2015) *An independent mission: the voluntary sector in 2015*, Baring Foundation.

10. Dean, J. (2015) 'Volunteering, the market and neoliberalism'. *People, Place and Policy* Vol. 9. Issue 2.

in practice at a time of major job losses and service closures. 631,000 public sector jobs were lost between 2008 and 2014 (10.7 percent of the workforce), and around a million more look likely to disappear under this administration.¹¹ Those losses are leaving gaps in provision that public service volunteering is being reshaped to address. In other words, however sensitively changes are being made at a micro level, pull back to the macro level and the reality appears to be displacement from paid to unpaid labour on a significant scale.¹²

11. Lavery, S. (2015) *Public and private sector employment across the UK since the financial crisis*. SPERI.

12. Analyses of apparent job displacement are often by, or on behalf of affected parties (Unison [2014] ‘Home Guard’ of police support to fill in for police cuts’), so independent longer term research would be welcome. The issue of displacement provokes vexed debate and a variety of views within volunteering organisations. Outright opposition may be softening. See, for example, Curtis, A. (2015) *Volunteering in the downturn: how volunteering and its structures are faring in the current economic crisis*. IVR/NCVO, pp.42-3.

Designing-in social productivity? The potential of public service volunteering

Our expectations of public services are changing in terms of quality, control and personalisation

Nevertheless, this is not all we are seeing. A change is underway that is more complex and potentially creative than simple cost reduction, substitution or retrenchment. A new set of volunteering practices around public services, formal and informal, are showing how the relationship between services and citizens can be re-shaped.

Public service volunteering can help to address public service challenges that are not simply financial, but also demographic, cultural and technological – challenges of a scale and kind that would overwhelm any system that casts citizens as consumers rather than engages with them as producers.

Our population is changing rapidly in terms of age, healthy life expectancy, ethnicity and mobility. Our expectations of public services are changing in terms of quality, control and personalisation. And technology is opening up new ways in which services or resources can be accessed, delivered, controlled or shared. Taken together, these changes point to the need for public services to shift away from point-of-need service delivery that draws predominantly on public resources, and towards preventative interventions that mobilise a variety of public, civic, commercial and private resources. The RSA terms this a shift from social security to social productivity.¹³

With a shift to social productivity, volunteering's role in achieving public service outcomes becomes far more dynamic than under a 'delivery state' model,¹⁴ in which it appears as a supplemental or parallel activity. Social productivity takes it as axiomatic that value in public services is created in the interaction (the relationship) between service and service user (the state and the citizen). In some cases, a simple transactional relationship is appropriate (I renew my road license online), but maximising the value of public services usually requires a more complex relationship. Social productivity therefore facilitates co-production at an individual level, while also emphasising collaboration at the level of community and

13. Commission on 2020 Public Services (2011) *From social security to social productivity: a vision for 2020 Public Services*. 2020 Public Services Trust at the RSA: http://clients.squareeye.net/uploads/2020/documents/PST_final_rep.pdf

14. The term is used by Geoff Mulgan in Cooke, G. and Muir R. eds (2012) *The relational state: how recognising the importance of human relationships could revolutionise the role of the state*. IPPR

place. Participation is its method and its ethos. The active citizenship that New Labour tried to stimulate through volunteering initiatives, and the responsible communities that the Conservative coalition hoped to unlock, are taken by social productivity as fundamental components of public service design, and seeks to measure the added value they bring as part of total factor productivity. In accepting the 2013 RSA Bicentenary Medal, Barry Quirk summarised the new design challenge as threefold: design kindness into the public realm; design contribution into public services; and design participation into democracy.¹⁵ Each of these imperatives connect with the renewal of volunteering.

So where and how is the expansion of volunteering in public services being informed by participative principles? Which services are adapting most creatively? And how are they approaching their challenges in ways that take them beyond service boundaries in order to strengthen collaboration and resilience within places?

Health and (to a lesser degree) social care services have been amongst the most innovative. In part this is because they have long operated in a landscape thickly populated with volunteering and voluntary sector organisations, undertaking roles ranging from fundraising to direct service provision. Yet it has also been because their burning platform has been particularly intense. They have felt the full heat of financial, demographic, technological and cultural change, leading many professionals and systems leaders to conclude that relying solely on professionally designed and delivered care services is neither attractive nor sustainable. We are a society that is living longer and living with more complex illness and impairments, putting heavy demands on medical resources. We therefore need to look outside the clinic and the hospital and focus on the personal and social conditions in which individuals, families and communities can manage their health successfully. Having borne down successfully on many long-standing threats to health using population wide interventions, we are now at a point where the greatest public health challenges are lifestyle related diseases. Their determinants are complex and social, so action to address them needs to be similarly multi-level and socially embedded. As the Marmot review noted in 2010, it is crucial that health and partner services engage with

individuals and communities [to] define the problems and develop community solutions. Without such participation and a shift of power towards individuals and communities it will be difficult to achieve the penetration of interventions needed to impact effectively on health inequalities.¹⁶

Social solutions, including formal and informal volunteering are therefore high on health's agenda. But before considering the forms they are taking it is instructive to note the importance of health not only as a service, but as a social institution that articulates principles, values and responsibilities. It colours our reading of the entire public service settlement: 'It's like

15. <https://www.thersa.org/discover/videos/event-videos/2013/11/design-and-public-services-from-soft-furnishings-to-hard-disciplines/>

16. Marmot, M. (2010) Fair Society, Healthy Lives. Marmot Review, p.34.

the NHS and the Union Jack, they're the same thing'.¹⁷ As our experiences with the NHS increasingly involve encounters with volunteering, this may normalise its role elsewhere. If I am involved in, or know people who are involved in, volunteer-led support programmes for heart problems, such as Braveheart, or peer support groups for managing lung conditions, such as Breathe Easy, I may be less likely to see calls for park volunteers or befrienders at my local Children's Centre as exceptional or discordant.

Though up to date national statistics are not available, health managers interviewed in 2013 predicted a 25 percent increase in hospital volunteers in the following years (from a national base of 78,000 at that point).¹⁸ Is the public supportive of or comfortable with this development? Polling for the Royal Voluntary Service in 2015 found that over a third of Britons (37 percent) 'are planning or considering volunteering in some capacity to help the NHS'.¹⁹ Setting aside for now the question of how many of those 'planning or considering' helping will translate intentions into action, what is significant is the broad assent to volunteering as a part of our quintessential public service. It needs our involvement.

The forms of that involvement today are numerous, some familiar, others more disruptive and bound up with radical system redesign. Hospital volunteering is among the more familiar forms. New investment and strategic planning are diversifying the activities being undertaken, so that alongside traditional roles such as dining companions and welcome-ers, we are also seeing the introduction of healthy lifestyle volunteers and specialist patient population volunteers (for people with learning disabilities, for example); but the distinctive value that most hospital volunteers bring continues to lie in their humanising touch. For patients who are potentially anxious or unhappy in large institutions for long stays, contact with volunteers tends to increase satisfaction and enhance care quality.²⁰ Other health institutions are also starting to do more with volunteers. The Practice Health Champion role developed by Altogether Better can do more than offer a listening ear or an extra pair of hands.²¹ Practice Health Champions perform bridging roles, connecting patients with support in their communities and connecting practices more strongly with those communities. Clinicians report that the volunteers positively challenge professional cultures by interacting as partners and experts rather than patients.²² Often operating without job descriptions, and instead agreeing the scope and priorities of their roles in ways that make the most sense of personal, practice and communities' resources, Practice

17. IPSOS MORI (2010) *Citizen engagement: testing policy ideas for public service reform*. 2020 Public Services Trust at the RSA: http://clients.squareeye.net/uploads/2020/documents/Citizen%20Engagement_FINAL_Web.pdf.

18. Galia, A. et al (2013) *Volunteering in acute trusts in England: understanding the scale and impact*. King's Fund.

19. RVS (June 2015) Press release: Britons keen to help ease pressure on the NHS: <http://www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/news-and-events/news/britons-keen-to-help-ease-pressure-on-the-nhs>.

20. Fitzsimons, B. et al (2014) 'Evaluation of the King's College Hospital volunteering service': https://www.nesta.org.uk/sites/default/files/kings_fund_evaluation_of_kch_impact_volunteering.pdf

21. For an account of Practice Health Champions and Community Health Champions, see <http://www.altogetherbetter.org.uk>.

22. <http://www.altogetherbetter.org.uk/practice-health-champions>

Health Champions are putting co-production into action.²³ In Marmot's terms, Health Champions can provide levels of 'penetration' that professionally delivered interventions have often struggled to achieve.

The Living Well Pioneer for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly has also shown how co-productive volunteering in health and social care can break down barriers between professional teams and connect care more effectively to sources of informal help and support in communities. Beginning in Newquay as a partnership between Age UK Cornwall, Volunteer Cornwall and the NHS, the programme has now extended to a number of locations and focuses on a variety of related issues. In the Penwith Pilot, the University of Exeter has evaluated the experience of volunteers, and considered how to build community capacity for social care for older people. Living Well has aimed to improve health and wellbeing for older people with long term conditions at risk of re-hospitalisation, improve their experience of care and support and reduce its cost.²⁴ Risk stratification by GPs identifies individuals who might benefit, and a guided conversation with the Age UK coordinator then helps the service user design the support they would value from a volunteer, sometimes in terms of companionship, often in terms of re-connecting with activities in the community. Volunteers are part of the Multi-Disciplinary Team around the individual, so their knowledge, views and expertise are valued equally alongside those of clinicians and specialists.

The University of Exeter's research showed that, in Living Well, strong relationships between and within groups of healthcare practitioners, GPs, older people, volunteers, community groups, and Living Well Coordinators are key. These are built and maintained through frequent face-to-face contact, conversations, information sharing, and activities. The particular configuration of these relationships is place-specific, dependent on both geography and existing social networks. Living Well therefore represents a highly personalised, patient-centred model that allows for creative co-production between patient, volunteer and service professional.

The volunteer involvement is not intended to be a cheaper version of services that already exist, nor is it an add-on service to refer to. It involves a fundamental change in practice by every member of the care team, in which the volunteer worker is an equal partner and each member has skills and expertise to offer. It is not about shifting jobs from one team to another, but about creating unique support for each individual, based on what matters most to them.²⁵

23. NMK (2015) 'Altogether Better Wellbeing Programme: champions and participants feedback survey'. Note that the programme was designed to introduce Practice Health Champions, Youth Health Champions and Pregnancy and Early Parenthood Champions.

24. Leyshon, C., Leyshon, M. and Kaesehage, K. (2015) *Living Well, Penwith Pioneer – How does Change Happen?* University of Exeter/NESTA Research Report.

25. See 'Case study Cornwall – according parity of esteem to volunteers' in NHS England (2015) *Integrated Care Pioneers: One Year On*. NHS England <http://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/pioneer-profiles-case-study.pdf>

Practice Health Champions and volunteers in Living Well are bridges into communities, as well as being mixing agents in professional health and social care systems that have often been compartmentalised. While maintaining necessary clinical risk protocols, they illustrate how co-productive approaches to service redesign tend to blur distinctions between professionals and recipients, and producers and consumers of services. So while Living Well has led to systems benefits and cost reductions (including a 49 percent reduction in non-elective admissions), health and wellbeing benefits appear to have been spread well beyond the service user. Like Practice Health Champions, Living Well volunteers report improvements in their health and wellbeing – a result that fits with evidence from volunteering more generally that shows a positive association with life satisfaction, wellbeing and (less clearly) physical health.²⁶ In Living Well, some volunteers have had very similar health profiles to those who GPs had identified for support, and many of the people identified for support have gone on to support the programme – and their communities – in volunteer roles. Increasing the number of people, especially older people, who are volunteering in health and social care is a public health strategy in its own right. Like other forms of volunteering, it is associated with increased social integration, self-esteem and self-efficacy, particularly for people in later life.²⁷

Beyond health and social care, volunteering is enabling other services to shift from narrow delivery models to social value approaches. The case of libraries is perhaps the most dramatic, and highlights both opportunities and risks. Drastic budget reductions have forced libraries to re-examine their role in a digital age, reconnecting with their purpose as sources of learning and social opportunity within communities. Many of today's libraries are designed as much around building social capital, networking community support, unlocking enterprise and facilitating public service integration as around access to books or archived records. 2014's *Independent Library Report for England* by William Seighart found 'extraordinary cases of the transformative effect that a community has had on shaping a library to suit their particular needs', and praised their rich social and educational contribution as crucial to national 'wellbeing'.²⁸ In many places, the transformation has gone beyond changed staffing models to encompass radical changes in governance and ownership. Volunteers in new community libraries, and services operating as mutuals or industrial and provident societies, have direct control and responsibility over their services.

However, not even the most optimistic account of reform can ignore the fact that library use continues to decline overall,²⁹ or that in many places change has been a bruising and potentially divisive process whose longer-term impacts on trust and participation in volunteering are hard

26. Smith, J. (2015) A guide to community centred approaches for health and wellbeing. Public Health England and NHS England: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/417515/A_guide_to_community-centred_approaches_for_health_and_wellbeing_full_report.pdf

27. Nazroo, J. and Matthews, K. (2012) *The impact of volunteering on well-being in later life*. WRVS.

28. Sieghart, W. (2014) *Independent Library Report for England*. DCMS. p.6.

29. CIPFA press release (2014): <http://www.cipfa.org/about-cipfa/press-office/archived-press-releases/2014-press-releases/cipfa-library-survey>.

to predict. The number of volunteers in UK local authority libraries rose by 100 percent between 2009-10 and 2013-14, with the number now standing at 35,813.³⁰ Change has frequently been pushed through with the explicit or implicit threat of closure. In 2011, Wiltshire's review of its library service led to the successful recruitment of nearly 650 volunteers (the largest group of council volunteers outside of schools). Yet although many people came forward in communities where their library was under threat of closure, numbers were lower where the library planned to retain core staff hours.³¹ It is not clear whether volunteers who step up to prevent closures are more or less likely to stay committed than those who come forward in order to improve or extend a service. Perhaps because of good management and support, retention rates in Wiltshire have been high. In Leicester, numbers fell from 381 in 2009-10 to 141 in 2013-14. In North Yorkshire, interviews with people who have volunteered to sustain rural libraries reveal that many, if not most of those who gave their time saw their efforts as a stopgap and believed that the service should be staffed professionally again at some point in the future.³² There is a risk of hard-pressed public bodies rushing to offload services to volunteer groups that falter in the longer term. But if public service volunteering is genuinely going to bring about a different balance of responsibilities between citizens and public bodies, there is no reason to think that the change will be immediately comfortable for either side. What is imperative is that we become more rigorous in understanding the relationship between commissioning, decommissioning, volunteering and outcomes over the medium and longer term. A social productivity analysis of gains, losses and unexpected displacements would be instructive.

30. CIPFA press release (2014): <http://www.cipfa.org/about-cipfa/press-office/archived-press-releases/2014-press-releases/cipfa-library-survey>.

31. <http://cms.wiltshire.gov.uk/documents/s53446/Volunteering%20in%20Wiltshire%20Appendix%203%20Libraries%20First%20Year%20Review%20of%20Community%20Library%20Volunteers.pdf>

32. OPM (2014) *Rural library services in England: exploring recent changes and possible futures: case study annex*. OPM and Locality: <http://www.opm.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Rural-libraries-case-studies.pdf>.

Localism: making the best of our places

Volunteering can connect services to the strengths of their communities, but not all communities have the same range of strengths

Library services in wealthy areas of the country have to date been more successful than services in poor areas in recruiting and deploying volunteers. 60 percent of councils in the south-east engage library volunteers that provide more than the national average of hours worked as a percentage of total hours, compared to just 9 percent of councils in the north-east.³³ Libraries, of course, hardly tell the whole story of volunteering and the social and economic background of those involved, but this stark difference does underline the importance of recognising that volunteering, particularly formal and regular volunteering, has a social gradient.³⁴

Volunteering can connect services to the strengths of their communities, but not all communities have the same range of strengths. There is a risk that heavier reliance on volunteering in public service delivery will lead to the richest provision clustering in the richest communities. In the words of the Sieghart report: ‘A library’s great strength – its localism – must not be allowed to become its weakness.’ We know from initiatives such as the Summer Reading Challenge and London’s Love Libraries, Love Volunteering that that weaknesses and risks can be overcome, and that all sections of the community can be engaged in library volunteering, just as diverse communities can be engaged in peer delivered health and public health projects, while informal forms of volunteering are particularly engaging for some multiply disadvantaged groups. And it is worth noting that some services – policing for example – have been more successful in reflecting the diversity of the community they serve through their volunteers than their paid staff

Nevertheless, Sieghart’s challenge is strong and relevant to all public services that are looking to do more through volunteering. How can the risks of patchy and inequitable provision be mitigated? Central government cannot wash its hands of responsibility for investment and safeguarding of standards. Whatever its limitations, the Pupil Premium

³³ These statistics are derived from CIPFA’s DCMS-funded reports of 2013/4 for English Library Authorities. The reports and data of 139 of 151 councils in England were published. These can be found at: <http://www.cipfa.org/services/statistics/comparative-profiles/public-libraries/cipfastats-library-profiles-english-authorities-2014>

³⁴ On the socio-demographic distinctions in regular formal volunteering, see Hill, M. (December 2014) Blog: Is volunteering really open to all? NCVO: <http://blogs.ncvo.org.uk/2014/12/04/is-volunteering-really-open-to-all/>; also Mohan, J. and Bulloch, S. (2012) *The idea of a ‘civic core’: overlaps between giving, volunteering and civic participation in England and Wales*. TSRC. On the social and educational gradient and arts volunteering, see DCMS Taking Part Survey.

has shown that it is possible to target resources in highly visible ways to take account of local variation, and there is no reason why a similarly clear approach to national priority setting and investment should not be taken for volunteering. The role of the centre is to be strategic but modest. The Big Society stumbled when extolling neighbourly local values in a Westminster accent. Centralism cannot develop the community embedded, relational forms of provision that a social productivity approach views as essential for future public services. Although devolution's drivers are multiple and its expression inconsistent, there is little doubt that the direction of policy is away from central direction and towards varieties of localism that allow more space for local identity and potentially more opportunities for co-design and co-production with local communities.

The life of volunteering is largely played out locally. It is shaped by our local relationships, our participation positively affecting our sense of place and community.³⁵ That sense of community and belonging may be as significant for volunteering as levels of income. 80 percent of councils in the south-west have engaged library volunteers that provide more than the national average of hours worked as a percentage of total hours – more than the wealthier south-east; and it is no accident that Living Well was developed in the south-west, where levels of 'helping out' as recorded by the Place Survey have been stronger than anywhere else in England, and people report the strongest sense of belonging to their immediate neighbourhood. Figure 1 brings together national volunteering data from 2008's Place Survey with data on indices of deprivation from 2010 to show levels of regular volunteering weighted by deprivation. The many outliers – positive and negative – indicate the importance of recognising the social as well as the economic character of a place in order to understand and ultimately influence its volunteering.

Many local authorities are attempting to raise levels of formal and informal volunteering through initiatives that draw on or enhance pride of place. UK Cities of Service provide a particularly focused, municipal form of an appeal that is being made more generally in many other areas in the form of community litter picks, good neighbour schemes and a myriad other initiatives.³⁶ Local people are being asked to identify with and participate in the values of the place they call home. Communications campaigns and arts-based strategies are being used in an attempt to encourage the sense of shared identity that can be the platform for pro-social behaviour, up to and including volunteering. Yet although local authorities and other local public service organisations are becoming more active in shaping and encouraging volunteering, there is still some way to go in agreeing how collaboration between them could ensure that the whole is more than the sum of its parts. As existing infrastructure support bodies struggle to cope with funding reductions, volunteering initiatives by public services remain

35. Ramsey, N. (2012) *Understanding how volunteering creates stronger communities: a literature review*. IVR

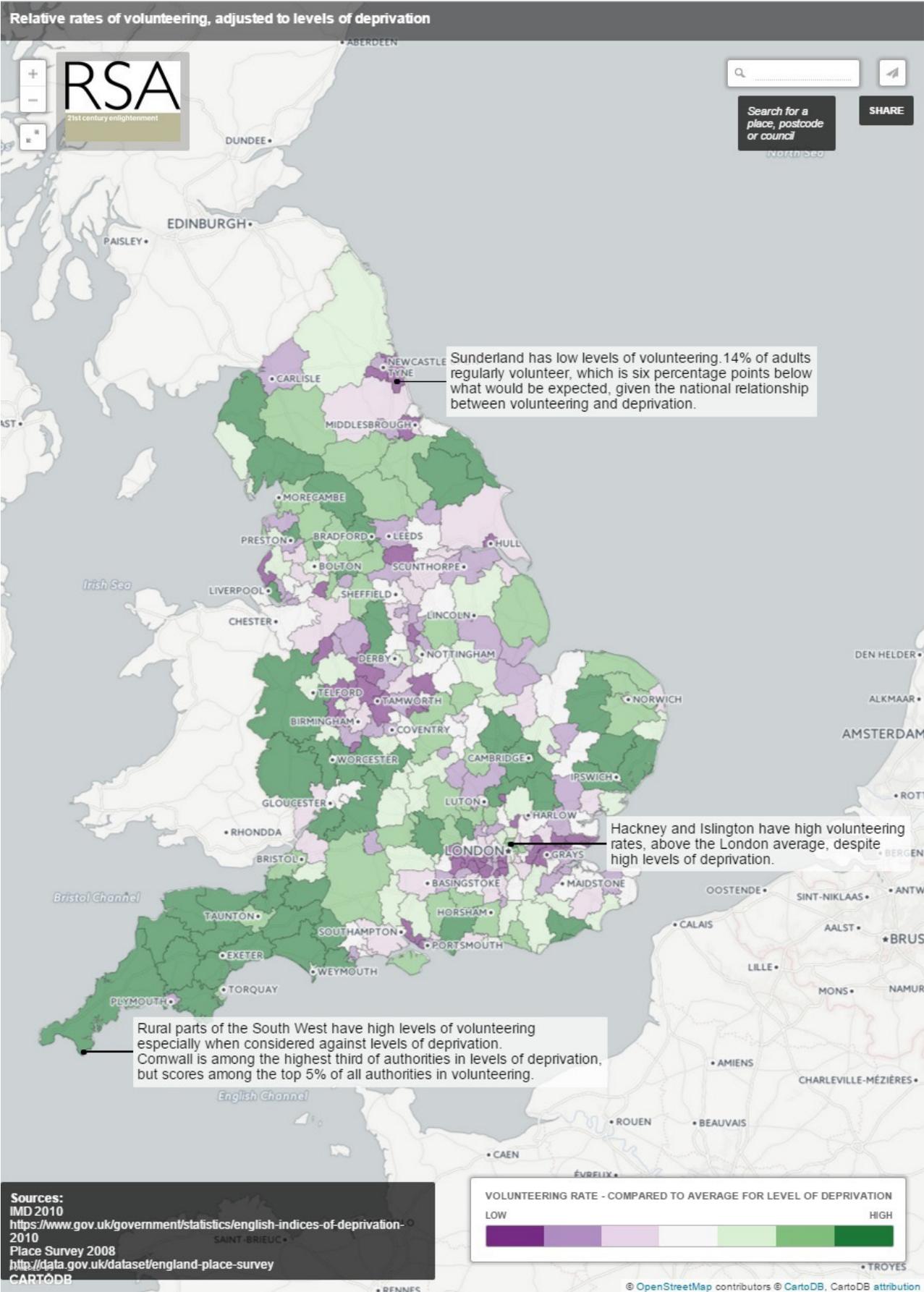
36. <http://www.nesta.org.uk/project/cities-service-uk>

predominantly service and sector specific. The recent introduction of council tax discounts in some parts of the country for a single type of volunteer – Special Constables – underlines the persistence of piecemeal thinking, privileging one type of role above others without any clear rationale, and missing the opportunity to fashion a wider narrative about recognition and reward.

The way forward at local level will include smarter information sharing, co-ordinated communications, shared resources for volunteer recruitment and for the development of high quality volunteer management, consistent regard to social value in commissioning and procurement, and more opportunities for business and corporate volunteering. The forthcoming introduction of three days paid leave in larger public and private sector organisations for volunteering brings huge opportunities to connect new people with volunteering that matters to them and their communities. Given what we know about the impact of volunteering, particularly for volunteers themselves, it makes sense to posit Health and Wellbeing Boards as a key cross-sector body at local level. But if local authorities and their partners are to create the conditions for greater volunteering, they will need to be as bold in the power they give away, as they need to be joined up in the power that they exercise. Volunteering interventions should be co-produced at a scale and in a context that participants feel to be relevant – neighbourhood, school, village, town, city. The local authority as lead implementation partner or brand may not be appropriate, especially in the case of large counties or unitaries – not all of which could claim to embody a strong local identity – but the local authority's strategic overview, its resources, data and intelligence will nevertheless be critically important. Local authorities like Wiltshire are already using data from their Joint Strategic Needs Analyses to engage directly with local communities and invite them to volunteer solutions that are based on their strengths and passions.

The charge levelled at public service volunteering at the beginning of this paper was that it uses governmentality – the assimilation and disciplining of citizens' creative and critical energy – to enable small state retrenchment. But the opposite could be true. Bringing volunteering within public services in ways that respect citizens' ability to collaborate in solutions could change our experience of the state. The local state, in particular, now has opportunities to make itself more accountable to citizens through volunteering, as co-produced initiatives create new forms of formal and informal governance, new institutions and new professional cultures. The prize is not simply a balanced budget. It is the opportunity to see ourselves and each other more clearly in our public services.

Figure 1



Annex 1

The following participants took part in the ‘Public Service volunteering: Co-producing New Local Services and Community Support’ roundtable at the RSA on 10 June 2015.

Swadeka Ahsum
Rob Andrew, Cornwall Council
Sophie Antonelli, The Green Backyard
Sara Bordoley, NHS England
David Buck, The King’s Fund
Paul Buddery, RSA
Jonathan Catherall, Spice Innovations Limited
Marcus Colman, Aspire2be Recovery Community
Jocelyn Cunningham, RSA
Jon Davis, Kirklees Libraries
Jagtar Dhanda, Macmillan Cancer Support
Katie Drew, Lewisham Library & Information Service
Iain Easton, Peterborough City Council
John Garnett, London Knowledge Lab
Clair Harvey, Suffolk County Council
Thomas Hauschildt, RSA
Marie-Ann Jackson, North Yorkshire County Council
Ian Jones, Volunteer Cornwall
Helen Lax, Essex County Council
Ruth Leonard, Macmillan Cancer Support
Catherine Leyshon, University of Exeter
Louise Mabley, Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust
Steve Milton, Wiltshire Council
Tracey Morgan, SSAFA
Nick Ockenden, Institute for Volunteering Research
Stephen Osgathorp, South West London & St George’s MH NHS Trust
Mark Parker, I Live in SE16
Susie Pascoe, RSA
Lorna Prescott, Dudley CVS
Carol Rawlings, National Association of Voluntary Services Managers
Hannah Rignell, Cabinet Office
Vicki Sellick, NESTA
Atif Shafique, RSA
Catherine Shovlin, Bold Vision
Ashfa Slater, Ecorys
Jane Stewart, London Youth Games
Matthew Taylor, RSA
Mark Taylor, Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead
Duncan Tree, Volunteering Matters
Krystal Vittles, Suffolk Libraries
Fiona Williams, Explore York Libraries and Archives
Terry Wilkins, College of Policing
Ian Wilson, North Somerset Council / Community Resilience North Somerset (CRNS)

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8 John Adam Street
London WC2N 6EZ
+44 (0)20 7930 5115

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