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Developing a Civic Approach to Public Services: Time to take pluralism seriously

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Introduction

The Commission organized 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). 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 for today’s dilemmas.

The idea of approaching public services from the vantage-point of citizenship has the potential to provide a richer alternative to the twin approaches to public service reform that successive governments have developed in recent years. Specifically, it has the capacity to move beyond an exclusive focus upon ‘entitlements’, which tends to present the citizen in a predominantly passive-recipient mode, on the one hand, and the idea of choice, on the other, which has been elevated by some into an end in its own right, with little accompanying regard for aggregate-level outcomes. Entitlements became the dominant motif of the approach to public services trumpeted by the Brown administration, and foundered in the sceptical political climate it inhabited, but also because of its

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wilful disinterest in the social environments and civic contexts in which the relationship between the receiving citizen and the giving state is conducted. Choice has been presented as the organizing principle for the rather different reforms which the current Coalition government is undertaking – in health, schools, universities and social care. But this apparently transparent and straightforward value becomes less plausible and more contested when applied to specific public service contexts. Thus, Prime Minister David Cameron argues that choice implies the accompanying principle of diversity of provision, with the implication that no default preference should be signalled between private, voluntary and public providers (Cameron, 2011). Meanwhile Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg and the Liberal Democrats maintain that diversity of provision means removing the advantages that were previously given to private-sector bidders for some public contracts, and are currently proposing restrictions to the introduction of a radical new commissioning and choice-based model of provision in the NHS. More generally, tensions between the individualistic mantra of ‘choice’ and the current government’s stress upon the big society remain largely unaddressed.

In this chapter I argue that the weaknesses of aspects of these different narratives can be usefully addressed from the perspective of established ideas of citizenship. A consideration of these is helpful to policy-makers reflecting upon the coherence and directionality of reforms they wish to undertake, and because, as the final report of the Commission organized by the 2020 Public Services Trust argues, it is in the interactions between citizens and services that public value is generated. Some of our familiar models of citizenship, I will argue, speak directly and tellingly to the dynamic and interactive quality of the relationships – between users and services, individuals and their communities, and citizens and state – which public services help shape and reinforce. A civic focus is all the more important in the context of the challenges 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 2020 Public Services Trust/Ipsos MORI (2010); Needham (2007: 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 characterized by what Anthony Giddens (1994) 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) characterized 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 *et al.*, 2009: 115). But how plausible is the characterization 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: 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 black and minority ethnic (BME) communities than it does among the relatively affluent and highly educated (Griffiths *et al.*, 2009). Research also suggests that the habit 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, especially after 2001, and remains a key motif within the UK's policy community. This commitment brought together two different emphases – the drive towards the provision of a set of standardized 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 dented the power of the choice-based narrative. It increasingly appears inadequate as a term to capture such disparate developments as the introduction of personalized budgets for some forms of social care and the right of parents and teachers to set up new state schools with their own distinctive ethos. Part of the problem with the doctrinaire assertion of choice is that while nearly all agree that increasing the choices available to users is a good thing, the question of what model of provision is most likely to deliver on this value, as well as other goals such as responsiveness and accountability, is a different question altogether.

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 (Clarke *et al.*, 2007). 'It's not like shopping' was the refrain these researchers encountered. 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 collectivity 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.

Specifically, there are important traces of republican and welfarist ideas still in circulation, 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 interdependency 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 a good deal of 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 to debate afresh what other models of citizenship we ought to cherish?

Citizenship as welfare

Classical liberal citizenship has been developed in competition with 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: 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 industrialization, 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. Whether a sense of public service ethos can survive major reductions in public sector budgets, is an important question in the current context – and what this sense of service means for GPs responsible for commissioning and freighted with budgetary responsibilities, will emerge as an important question in the wake of the NHS reforms being developed by the current government.

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 insofar as they are not subject to the exercise of arbitrary forms of power over their lives and choices, and, learning to be a 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 socio-logical 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 corrective to those accounts of the Big Society that imagine the increasingly depleted voluntary and charitable sectors stepping forward as the big state is pulled 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. 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. More generally a renewed republican ethos could well permit politicians to talk in a different way to the public about the unavoidable tradeoffs and compromises that major reductions in spending require.

Interpreting contemporary social attitudes towards 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 (2020 Public Services Trust/ 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 per cent 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. 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 (2020 Public Services Trust/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 found 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.

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 recognize is likely to lead to considerable variation in service provision.

How should we interpret these findings and 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 in 2010 suggests some support for this contention in relation to crime and anti-social behaviour, with 82 per cent 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 per cent of the sample, and the idea of parents setting up new schools, favoured by only 41 per cent (Institute for Public Policy Research/PricewaterhouseCoopers 2010: 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. Proponents of the Big Society, from right and left, need to give much greater emphasis to the task of persuading and winning people over to the notion that communities, voluntary and charitable groups should take over the provision of core services. This polling points to entrenched resistance, at the level of principle, to the notion that responsibility for public goods should be pooled with individuals, families or communities. Thus, while 82 per cent agreed that individuals and communities should do more to help the police tackle crime and anti-social behaviour, only 3 per cent felt that they themselves should be deemed responsible for ensuring that their streets were a safe place to live. In addition, 41 per cent favoured allowing parents to set up schools but only 2 per cent reported that they believed that individuals should be primarily responsible for running them, compared with 93 per cent who saw this as the state's duty. Most strikingly of all, 76 per cent 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 recognize 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 and their 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 per cent indicating support for expanding the scheme), they were significantly less likely to get involved themselves (26 per cent said they would be interested in doing so), and follow-up research showed that only 2 per cent actually did (Institute for Public Policy Research/PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2010: 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 (Savage *et al.*, 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 per cent in 2003 to 77 per cent in 2008–9. 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: 21), 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: 6). Reform guided by this model can build upon some important and long-established forms of networking and association, both at the microlevels – the street, the neighbourhood and the estate – and at grander scales, through the practice of local authorities, third sector bodies and voluntary organizations.

Co-production faces some difficult challenges before it can be regarded as a generalizable 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. This includes a greater shift towards the passing of budgetary control to individual users of social care services. 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.

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. The unwillingness of the Department for Communities and Local

Government to do more than criticize local authorities that have, entirely predictably, made cuts to voluntary and community organizations focusing upon preventative and other non-statutory forms of provision, suggests that this message has not been fully grasped in government. 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, or pension reform, 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 commit more time to caring duties as elderly family members come to live longer. Across a whole range of social issues and policy areas, politicians need to retrieve and project a much stronger sense of the common good. 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 (2020 Public Services Trust/Ipsos MORI, 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 towards 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 mobilization 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 organizations in this sector may not, however, be well 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 interstices 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 'Reducing offending through advice' (ROTA) project, for instance, successfully trains prisoners to support fellow prisoners (NEF, 2008: 8–10; Halpern *et al.*, 2004).

Concluding thoughts

This chapter has focused on the limitations of the idea of the consumer-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 and how we can be encouraged to do so. These older ideas about citizenship also continue to resonate in contemporary public attitudes, providing 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 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 critical yardsticks 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 organizations 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 between different local areas, 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'.