

Public Service

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Executive Summary

Public Service is a proposal for a new social enterprise to embed talented young PLACE¹ professionals within public authorities and develop the public sector's capacity for proactive planning. The initiative would be to the built environment what Teach First is to education, and Frontline is to social services. Its mission would be to build a better everyday environment for all. Public Service would deliver on the Farrell Review by "attracting and retaining the best individuals for planning departments"² "to bring about a revolution in support of proactive planning in this country."³ It would do this by offering public authorities hand-picked, highly motivated and specially trained PLACE professionals for flexible placements at affordable rates, subsidised through private sector support. Public Service would build a national pool of skills and expertise to grow the public sector's capacity to deliver homes; support collaborative planning and sharing of resources across authorities; and develop a new generation of public place makers committed to working with communities to shape better places.

The Farrell Review states that "the industry is united in the belief that the current housing crisis will only be solved by thinking long term and through proactive planning."⁴ Yet few in the industry would agree that the public sector currently has the capacity for the proactive planning we need to deliver homes and growth. Despite the hard work and commitment of local authority planning departments, there is a real and widening skills gap between the public and private sectors across the PLACE professions. This gap is not just about staff numbers and budgets. It is also about talent. Too few talented young PLACE professionals are attracted to work for public authorities. Too many talented officers who have chosen to work for the public are not being retained. As a result, authorities are increasingly turning to external consultants and private agencies to fill the gap - eroding capacity over the longer-term and resulting in unnecessary costs. It is time to put enterprise back into public service.

This paper has been written by Finn Williams in an independent capacity, in consultation with practitioners and stakeholders from across the field. Feedback would be welcomed at finn@commonoffice.co.uk.

¹ PLACE is the acronym used in the Farrell Review to bring together the professions of Planning, Landscape, Architecture, Conservation, and Engineering. This paper also takes it to include Urban Design and Regeneration.

² *The Farrell Review, 2014, Recommendation #20*

³ *The Farrell Review, 2014, Recommendation #19*

⁴ *The Farrell Review, 2014, p.77*

A flexible and affordable resource for public authorities

Public Service would offer public authorities access to a talent pool of rigorously selected PLACE professionals with specialist skills for flexible placements of 1-2 years. Candidates would typically have 3-10 years postgraduate experience. The placement process would be quicker and simpler than traditional recruitment, and wages would be paid at cost price – offering a saving on private agencies. Training, mentoring, personal development and administration costs would be covered by sponsorship and in-kind support from the development industry.

An opportunity for PLACE professionals to work for the public good on their own terms

Public Service would be a prestigious programme attracting private practitioners interested in a career change, looking to learn from a public perspective, or seeking part-time work. Successful candidates would be given an intensive training course, mentoring from leading industry figures and ongoing peer-to-peer learning. Job descriptions would be focused on proactive planning, encouraging innovative, cross-departmental, strategic work. Pay would be commensurate with fixed-term public sector posts, and job conditions would be more flexible.

A force for proactive planning to deliver homes and growth

Placements would provide authorities with additional capacity for proactive planning to complement and augment existing planning services, not replace them. Outcomes would include greater certainty and speed of development through masterplanning; increasing public sector delivery of homes through new build programmes and partnerships; better value capital projects through intelligent clienting; stimulating enterprise and inward investment; and improving public engagement by working closely with communities.

A network that builds the long-term capacity of public authorities

A fundamental principle is that each placement leaves the partner authority stronger. Candidates would only provide added value to an authority's core functions, going above and beyond established services. The programme would maximise retention rates by guaranteeing an interview for a public sector role at the end of each placement, linking candidates with progression routes into leadership roles, and developing career paths across public sector organisations. Knowledge developed during placements would be recorded and shared with partner authorities, giving access to lessons learnt and good practice.

An exchange between the public and private sectors

Public Service would help to break down the adversarial nature of the planning process by enabling a freer flow of PLACE professionals between the private and public sectors. The programme would provide a framework for private practices to “champion the civic” through pro-bono training, sponsored placements and enabling. This ‘anti-silo mentality’ would extend to cross-departmental, multi-disciplinary working within authorities, where candidates would be given the scope to work horizontally across services.

A more equal and diverse workforce

Addressing inequality in the industry is essential to addressing spatial inequality in the built environment. The rigorous assessment process and flexible job conditions of Public Service would be carefully designed to improve access to the PLACE sector for women, ethnic minorities, and people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

A pipeline for a future generation of PLACE leaders

The programme would develop a new generation of highly skilled, publicly minded design champions in public authorities, and across the profession. Intensive training, regular get-togethers, and an alumni structure would help individuals form a network of mutual support. In the longer term, it could generate a movement of advocates for proactive planning to help bring about a culture shift in the planning system.

A meeting ground for public sector innovation.

Public Service has the potential to achieve more than the sum of each placement. By collecting the learning of every candidate in a central bank of knowledge the programme can help to share innovative practice and expertise across authorities, facilitate collaborative working across city regions and housing market areas, scale-up innovations and drive efficiencies.

Why Public Service is needed

A lack of public planning capacity is holding back the delivery of homes and growth

The twin pressures of an increasing need for housing at a time of decreasing resources are understandably causing concern for local authorities. The Local Government Information Unit reports that planning departments are reaching a critical point. 60% of Local Planning Authorities disagree or strongly disagree that future levels of human and financial resource and capacity in planning departments are adequate to meet future workload.⁵ Significantly, these concerns are shared by private sector developers who, in a separate study, “expressed the view that in the current climate of fiscal austerity, there was a risk that planning departments would become under-resourced and that this could delay and undermine the planning process.”⁶ Both local authorities and developers agree that the delivery of housing and great place making relies on “the provision of dedicated staff with appropriate training and seniority”.⁷ On the other hand, a “lack of planning capacity in general and design expertise in particular can result in considerable frustration for developers, cause delays in the process and add additional costs.”⁸

Housing need is particularly pronounced in London, where the GLA has identified public sector speed and delivery as one of four main ‘Barriers to Housing Delivery’. The 2012 report notes that “some planning departments are considered understaffed. Interviewees also commented on a perceived skills gap in some planning departments.”⁹ This is backed up by a survey of London’s placeshaping capacity carried out in 2014, which reveals an uneven landscape of resources across boroughs, where capacity does not always correlate with areas of planned growth. 67% of boroughs said they require or strongly require more skills to carry out architectural design, urban design and masterplanning in house.¹⁰ London First and the London Enterprise Panel have called for “beefing up borough-level planning resources to speed up planning and precommencement processes.”¹¹

Inadequate capacity is not just constraining the public sector’s ability to respond to the pressures of development - there is also an opportunity cost. A lack of proactive planning is failing to prepare strategically for the future and realise the public sector’s potential to deliver growth. There is

⁵ [Local Government Information Unit, *Localism at Risk: Is the NPPF delivering planning for people?*, 2013](#)

⁶ [Smith Institute, *Housing and Planning: what makes the difference?*, 2014](#)

⁷ [Smith Institute, *Housing and Planning: what makes the difference?*, 2014](#)

⁸ [Design Council CABE, *The Bishop Review*, 2011](#)

⁹ [Mayor of London, *Barriers to Housing Delivery*, 2012](#)

¹⁰ [Mayor’s Design Advisory Group, *London’s Placeshaping Capacity*, 2014](#)

¹¹ [London First and the London Enterprise Panel, *London 2036 an agenda for jobs and growth*, 2015](#)

some exemplary practice amongst local authorities who are optimising the potential of public land to deliver much needed homes, but it is not widespread enough. The value of public assets are estimated at £250bn, yet “many councils lack the capacity to manage property well.”¹²

There is a widening skills gap between the public and private sectors across the PLACE professions

Significant reforms of the planning system have been introduced over the last few years to support sustainable development. But their success depends on having the right expertise to implement reforms at a local level. The Farrell Review found that “attracting and retaining the best individuals for local authority planning departments was seen as key to enabling a culture change from reactive to proactive planning.”¹³ If anything, it is the people rather than the policies that make the biggest difference at a local level. “Crudely put, good people can work round bad policies but good policies cannot work round bad people.”¹⁴

The 2008 Communities and Local Committee ‘Planning Matters’ report forecast a labour shortage and skills gap in local government. “There is a drastic shortage of planning officers, estimated to affect 46% of local authority posts by 2012. There is also a significant and growing skills gap among those planners who remain within the system.”¹⁵ Since then, economic constraints have exacerbated an existing shortfall. The £10bn savings delivered by local authorities in the three years from 2011/12¹⁶ have inevitably impacted on overall levels of resource. Net local authority spending on planning and development services reduced by more than half between 2009-10 and 2014-15 – the largest scale of reductions to any service area.¹⁷ With similar levels of savings expected to be required over the next two years, there are few options available for planning departments to bridge the gap.

However, the widening skills gap between the public and private sectors is as much about the quality and type of expertise than the quantity of staff. There are many examples of excellent practice within planning departments, but in a climate of austerity public authorities are finding it harder to attract the most talented PLACE professionals, and harder to keep those with the ambition and capabilities to find jobs elsewhere. “Across the country, even where resources are available, it has proved difficult to attract good professional staff, especially with design skills, to work in the public sector. The present pressures on local authority

¹² [Audit Commission, *Room for Improvement: Strategic asset management in local government*, 2009](#)

¹³ [The Farrell Review, 2014, p.75](#)

¹⁴ [The Farrell Review, 2014, p.149](#)

¹⁵ [Communities and Local Government Committee, *Planning Matters: Labour shortages and skills gaps*, 2008](#)

¹⁶ [Local Government Association, *Under pressure: How councils are planning for future cuts*, 2014](#)

¹⁷ [Institute for Fiscal Studies, *Central Cuts, Local Decision-Making*, 2015](#)

budgets are only likely to exacerbate this problem.”¹⁸ The ASC’s Mind the Skills Gap report raises the irony that the very bodies charged with ‘place shaping’ – creating sustainable communities where people want to live – are rarely organisations where new graduates want to work.¹⁹

At the same time, the skills that public authorities do still have in-house are not necessarily the right type to deliver proactive planning. In the House of Lords debate of the Farrell Review, Lord Tyler raised concerns over the design literacy of local authorities, and identified a lack of three-dimensional design skills such as a result of a reduction of in house architectural expertise. In the 1970s 50% of architects were employed by the public sector, now less than 9% are.²⁰ It is therefore unsurprising that 67% of London boroughs require or strongly require more visual communication, drawing and presentation skills.²¹

None of this is news. The skills gap is longstanding and systemic, and cannot be attributed to austerity measures alone. The 2011 Bishop Review warns that “The erosion of capacity and design capability within local authorities is a major issue. Although this is a process that has been going on for years (if not decades), it has now reached a critical stage and needs to be urgently addressed if costly delays and poor quality schemes are to be avoided.”²² Even in 2008, the Communities and Local Government Committee concluded that “perhaps the most surprising, and frustrating, point to arise repeatedly from this inquiry is the fact that labour and skills shortages in planning are so unsurprising. They have been evident for well over a decade but review after review, report after report, recommendation after recommendation have not resulted in their reduction. This must change.”²³

¹⁸ Design Council CABE, *The Bishop Review*, 2011

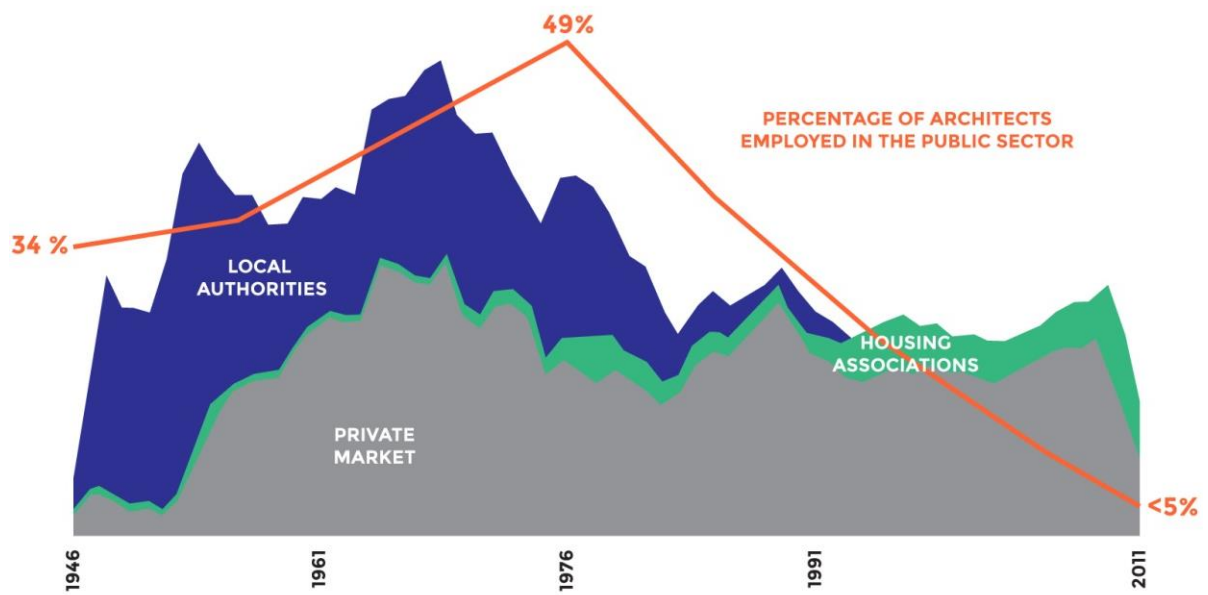
¹⁹ Communities and Local Government Committee, *Planning Matters: Labour shortages and skills gaps*, 2008

²⁰ RIBA Building Futures, *The Future for Architects?*, 2011

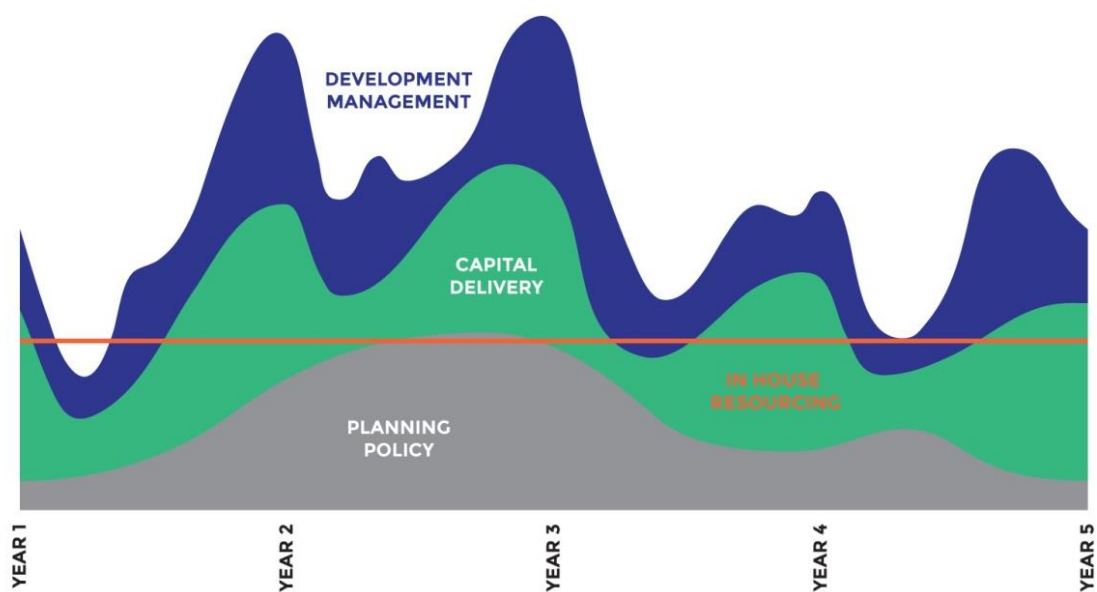
²¹ Mayor’s Design Advisory Group, *London’s Placeshaping Capacity*, 2014

²² Design Council CABE, *The Bishop Review*, 2011

²³ Communities and Local Government Committee, *Planning Matters: Labour shortages and skills gaps*, 2008



Post-war housing delivery by sector, compared to percentage of architects employed in the public sector.



Indicative resource profile for a local authority planning department, showing how flexible resources are needed to manage peaks in workload.

Case Study: Teach First

Teach First is an independent charity that aims to ensure every child in the country has access to an excellent education. Since launching in London in 2002, Teach First has placed over 3,700 graduates in disadvantaged schools across England. Successful candidates are chosen following a recruitment process including an online application and a day-long assessment involving a competency based interview, a group exercise, a sample teaching lesson and self-evaluation. They then complete a six week residential training programme before beginning a two-year placement. After the first year they gain a PGCE qualification making them fully qualified teachers. The programme was initially targeted at recent graduates, but now over 10% of participants have been out of university for more than five years. Teach First has faced criticism for poor cost-effectiveness and low rates of retention – not helped by its name which suggest participants "teach first, then get a better job". But 54% of those who have completed Teach First are still teaching (which is comparable to the rate for standard postgraduate training courses), and over 70% continue to work in education. Teach First demonstrates how opening up new career paths can transform perceptions of a profession and attract a different type of workforce.

Public sector job conditions are not attracting or keeping the best individuals

A fundamental cause of the skills gap is that public authorities are failing to compete with the private sector to recruit and retain talented PLACE professionals. 70% of public sector managers believe that a lack of new talent applying for public sector roles is hindering efficiency in their organisation.²⁴ The primary reason is public sector job conditions rather than pay conditions: "Poor perception of the public sector" is identified by managers as the single biggest factor preventing the hiring of new talent in the public sector – above uncompetitive salary levels.²⁵ Perceptions that public authorities offer jobs with relatively short hours, inflexible terms and slow progression can act as a disincentive for ambition. The type of PLACE professionals whose skills are currently lacking in public authorities may be more attracted by working longer hours with less security, in return for greater flexibility and faster progression. As the 'Planning Matters' report recognises, one size of employment contract does not fit all types of expertise: "a more flexible attitude towards ages – and wages – is required within local authorities if local government is to recruit and retain the planners it needs."²⁶

²⁴ [CEBR & totaljobs.com, *Bridging the Gap: Attracting new talent into the Public Sector*, 2012](#)

²⁵ [CEBR & totaljobs.com, *Bridging the Gap: Attracting new talent into the Public Sector*, 2012](#)

²⁶ [Communities and Local Government Committee, *Planning Matters: Labour shortages and skills gaps*, 2008](#)

Not only the job conditions but also the job descriptions need to be more appealing. Misconceptions that local authority planning jobs are bureaucratic and reactive deter people who want to plan proactively. These preconceptions are challenged by POS NOVUS, a group of young public sector planners: “Planning is a creative industry: Denying that planning can be creative will deny us of creative planners. We believe that planning is about more than saying yes or no.”²⁷ To be creative and proactive, planning department job descriptions need more scope for enterprise and innovation, strategy and delivery. “Creating the right job conditions within local planning departments to attract the best people will be key... Offering inspiring, experimental and socially minded roles would help get first-class architecture and built environment graduates into the public sector.”²⁸

Case Study: Design Exchange Programme

SITRA's Design Exchange Programme has been placing strategic designers within Finland's ministries and municipalities on long-term contracts, supported by a network for horizontal knowledge and experience sharing. The Programme aims to “build design capability within national and municipal government; prepare a new generation of promising, capable strategic designers; create career paths for designers to work in the public sector; and help develop more design-enlightened public servants”. SITRA fund 50% of the salary costs to lower the barrier of adoption, meet weekly with designers to provide support, and meet monthly with full public sector teams to review strategic objectives. The Design Exchange Programme shows how creating a role for innovation with public organisations can attract strategic designers with the skillsets to develop more effective public services.

Recruitment is currently a barrier to embedding talent within public authorities

Even if talented PLACE professionals can be attracted to work for public authorities, the complexity and inflexibility of public sector recruitment remains an obstacle to employing them on the payroll. 81% of London boroughs consider that the complexity of recruitment processes is an occasional or significant barrier to meeting placeshaping capacity needs.²⁹ The paperwork involved in managing a recruitment process can seem to take more work than it would save. The time it takes to recruit can be so long (often months) that the original demand may have passed by the time someone is in post. HR requirements to recruit internally first from a decreasing pool of talent make it harder to bring in specialist

²⁷ [NOVUS, *A Manifesto from the Coalface of Public Planning*, 2014](#)

²⁸ [The Farrell Review, 2014, p.75](#)

²⁹ [Mayor's Design Advisory Group, *London's Placeshaping Capacity*, 2014](#)

PLACE skills.³⁰ In addition, public authorities facing financial uncertainty are less likely to commit to recruiting staff through permanent or even fixed-term contracts, when more flexible arrangements are available through private agencies and external consultants. 62% of London boroughs consider that uncertainty over funding in the medium to longer term is a significant barrier to meeting placeshaping capacity needs. Only 5% do not consider this a barrier.³¹

An increasing reliance on agency workers is draining public resources and expertise

The complexity of public sector recruitment, the difficulty of attracting talented candidates, and the need for flexibility in a climate of financial uncertainty mean it is often easier for public authorities to meet their capacity needs using agency workers. In 2010, local authorities spent a total of approximately £1.8bn on agencies.³² The annual spend in London alone was £742m. A survey of London's placeshaping Capacity found that 81% of boroughs currently meet placeshaping capacity needs by sometimes or routinely recruiting agency workers.³³

Agencies offer a simpler, quicker and more flexible alternative to meeting capacity needs than traditional public sector recruitment. But the use of agencies raises a number of issues over the longer-term. Firstly the extra cost; agency commission can be as much as 50% of a worker's hourly wage³⁴. The higher turnover rate of agency workers results in a lack of continuity which brings hidden costs, including time spent re-briefing replacements. This churn can mean agency workers are unable to build up local knowledge or organisational awareness, sometimes resulting in unnecessary delays to projects or missed opportunities. A borough responding to the survey of London's Placeshaping Capacity commented "outsourcing entire projects means losing the opportunity to help grow ideas and talent from within the team, and utilise local knowledge."³⁵ Delays can also happen as a result of a lack of accountability or commitment; "it was felt that on occasion consultants could slow the planning process because they were under less time pressure than the planning staff themselves."³⁶

There is a risk that public authorities compensate for a reduction in permanent capacity with an increase in the use of more expensive agency workers – the equivalent of “pawning your watch, then paying to ask for the time”. The LGA and Audit Commission report ‘Work in

³⁰ [Dods Research & totaljobs.com. Recruiting for today's public sector, 2014](#)

³¹ [Mayor's Design Advisory Group. London's Placeshaping Capacity, 2014](#)

³² [Local Government Group. Agency workers in local government: Evidence review, 2010](#)

³³ [Mayor's Design Advisory Group. London's Placeshaping Capacity, 2014](#)

³⁴ [Capital Ambition & London Borough of Havering. Procurement of temporary, agency and interim staff: toolkit update, 2010](#)

³⁵ [Mayor's Design Advisory Group. London's Placeshaping Capacity, 2014](#)

³⁶ [Smith Institute. Housing and Planning: What makes the difference?, 2014](#)

Progress' recognises that local authority spending on agency workers increased by 46% from 2004-05 to 2009-10.³⁷ However the majority of local authorities are now renegotiating contracts to make savings. Lambeth Council reduced the number of agency workers it employed from over 900 in 2009 to under 300 in 2011, saving £18 million in the process.³⁸

Case Study: NHS Professionals

NHSP was created by the Department for Health in 2000 as a national service to manage the supply of temporary staff to NHS Trusts and improve the quality of patient care. With around 40,000 nurses, doctors, midwives and other healthcare professionals, NHSP is now the leading provider of managed flexible staff to the NHS. Temporary staff are often employed from private agencies or internal staff banks across the NHS to cover staffing shortfalls and fluctuating workloads. However agency workers can cost up to seven times more than staff on the NHS payroll. By managing shift demand, optimising pay rates and eliminating agency use, NHSP offers savings of 20% on flexible workforce costs. At the same time it offers attractive conditions for healthcare professionals looking to work flexibly in the NHS on their own terms. The NHS Professionals Bank demonstrates how the strategic management of a centralised pool of staff can provide better value for money than private agencies.

³⁷ [LGA & Audit Commission, Work in Progress: Meeting local needs with lower workforce costs, 2011](#)

³⁸ [LGA & Audit Commission, Work in Progress: Meeting local needs with lower workforce costs, 2011](#)

What Public Service would do

A flexible and affordable resource for public authorities

Public Service would offer public bodies such as Local Authorities and Development Corporations rigorously selected, highly motivated PLACE professionals with specialist skills for flexible placements of 1-2 years. Candidates would typically have 3-10 years postgraduate experience. They would be humble enough to fit in, bold enough to make a difference, and savvy enough to hit the ground running. For public authorities who find it difficult to attract the best individuals, Public Service would offer access to a new pool of talent and creditable expertise.

Once public authorities have signed up to the programme, the placement process would be quicker and simpler than traditional public sector recruitment. As a not-for-profit social enterprise Public Service would not take a commission for the placements, meaning public authorities pay wages at 'cost price' – offering a saving on private agencies.

Training, mentoring, personal development and administration costs including recruitment would be covered by support from the private sector. This would follow the established model of organisations like Frontline and Future of London, where private sector partners offer sponsorship or pro-bono support for mentoring, training, marketing, human resources or legal advice. There is evidence that developers or investors may be willing to subsidise additional Local Authority capacity if it helps to de-risk the planning process and timescales.³⁹

An opportunity for PLACE professionals to work for the public good on their own terms

Public Service would offer young PLACE professionals the opportunity to 'do good' and accelerate their career at the same time. They might be interested in a career change after a few years in a large practice, a sabbatical to learn from the public perspective, or looking for part-time work to balance with teaching, childcare, or starting up on their own.

The programme would be high profile, highly selective, and prestigious. Successful candidates would be given an intensive training course run by top PLACE practitioners, mentoring from leading industry figures, ongoing peer-to-peer support, and a platform for developing new thinking through original research.

³⁹ [EC Harris, UK Housing Output: Solving the Delivery Capacity Conundrum, 2014](#)

Job descriptions would be focused on proactive planning, encouraging innovative, cross-departmental, strategic work. Pay would be commensurate with permanent or fixed-term public sector posts, and job conditions would be more flexible. For example, candidates could choose to work less or more than 36 hours-a-week on a pro-rata basis, allowing parallel practice, childcare, or a higher salary.

At the end of the placement, candidates would be offered career paths into the public sector. They would also have access to a wider network of leading public and private PLACE practitioners. And in the longer term, they would have the opportunity to form a movement of public leaders committed to building a better everyday environment for all.

Case Study: Artist Placement Group

Founded by Barbara Steveni and John Latham in 1966, APG negotiated placements for artists within government departments and large corporations including the Scottish Office and Milton Keynes Development Corporation, lasting from a few weeks to several years. Artists would work to an 'open brief' where they were not required to produce tangible works of art, but would benefit the hosts by bringing alternative ways of seeing and thinking about their organisation. The Group staged a major exhibition '*Art and Economics*' at the Hayward Gallery in 1971, and continued until 1979. APG shows the creative potential of having an 'outsider's' perspective inside a public sector organisation.

A force for proactive planning to deliver homes and growth

Public Service placements would focus specifically on providing authorities with additional capacity for proactive planning. This capacity would complement and augment existing planning services, not replace them. In other words, candidates would be tasked with 'making things happen that would not have happened anyway'.

Tasks might include strategic spatial reviews of public authority estates to optimise the delivery of housing and social infrastructure; innovative feasibility studies to unlock the value of public sector assets; bids to secure additional funding; intelligent clienting for capital projects like housing, schools, transport and public realm; detailed spatial, economic and social mapping; meaningful public engagement; and co-ordinating delivery in complex opportunity areas involving multiple stakeholders.

Housing Revenue Account reform also creates a specific opportunity for Public Service candidates to help local authorities make the most of powers to invest in, and create, new housing. Housebuilding demands skillsets that few local authorities have had in house since the 1970s. Public Service would enable local authorities to quickly build that capacity with readymade delivery teams.

Croydon's Spatial Planning Service and Placemaking Team have demonstrated how this kind of proactive planning can stimulate and support social and economic enterprise; secure inward investment; change perceptions of places; increase certainty for development; build the support of communities; and deliver more, better quality homes. The success of Public Service would be evaluated on similar terms, through both immediate outcomes and longer-term social impact.

A network that builds the long-term capacity of public authorities

A fundamental principle of Public Service is that each placement leaves the partner authority stronger. To prevent the displacement of existing staff Public Service candidates would only provide added value to an authority's core functions, going above and beyond established development management and plan making services. The programme would not be a substitute for other essential capacity building measures such as training for existing staff.

The programme would be designed to maximise retention rates within authorities by guaranteeing an interview for a public sector role at the end of each placement, linking candidates with progression routes into leadership roles, and developing career paths across public sector organisations. Candidates would be guaranteed an interview for a public sector role at the end of their placements. However there is also value in candidates taking the experience of working for a public authority into other influential roles, whether for government, the third sector, or private sector.

Placement periods would be as long as possible (for example 1-2 years) to minimise churn. Local knowledge developed during a placement would be recorded and embedded within public authorities. Intelligence from placements would also be pooled centrally and shared with partner authorities, giving access to wider trends, lessons learnt, best practice and benchmarking. It is hoped the programme would also have secondary benefits for existing staff through exposure to new ways of working and specialist skills.

An exchange between the public and private sectors

Public Service would help to break down the adversarial nature of the planning process by enabling a freer flow of PLACE professionals between the private and public sectors. As explained in the Farrell Review, "an exchange of ambitions, an exchange of intentions [between public and private sectors] can actually lead to high social and economic values."⁴⁰ It should no longer be a case of 'them versus us'.

⁴⁰ [The Farrell Review, 2014, p.51](#)

Public Service would be open to private sector support through pro-bono training or sponsored placements, where practices support staff to take sabbaticals in the public sector (although care would need to be taken to prevent conflicts of interest). The programme would provide a framework for private practices to “champion the civic”⁴¹ through pro-bono training, sponsored placements and enabling.

This ‘anti-silo mentality’ would extend to cross-departmental, multi-disciplinary working within authorities. With chief executive or executive director buy-in, candidates would be given the scope to solve complex problems by working horizontally across services, from parks to parking, education to estates, or housing to highways.

A more equal and diverse workforce

Only 16% of RIBA members are women.⁴² It is as few as 13% across the Built Environment industry. Ethnic minorities are similarly underrepresented.⁴³ Addressing inequality in the industry is essential to addressing spatial inequality in the built environment. The rigorous assessment process and flexible job conditions of Public Service would be carefully designed to improve access to the PLACE sector for women, ethnic minorities, and people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. There is also potential for partnerships with initiatives like the FLUID Mentoring Programme, which supports people from diverse backgrounds aiming for management and leadership roles in the built environment.

A pipeline for a future generation of PLACE leaders

The true potential of Public Service is not necessarily what candidates achieve on their placements, it is what they go on to achieve afterwards. The programme would develop a generation of highly skilled, publicly minded design champions in public authorities, and across the profession. Like highly selective graduate schemes, having Public Service on their CVs should be recognised as a mark of excellence. Intensive training, regular get-togethers, and an alumni structure would help these individuals form a network of mutual support. In the longer term, it could generate a movement of advocates for proactive planning to help bring about a culture shift in the planning system.

A meeting ground for public sector innovation

Public Service has the potential to achieve more than the sum of each placement. By collecting the learning of every candidate in a central bank

⁴¹ [The Farrell Review, 2014, p.51](#)

⁴² [RIBA President, Making a Difference, 2014](#)

⁴³ [A cross-party parliamentarians' inquiry, No more lost generations: creating construction jobs for young people, 2014](#)

of knowledge – a sort of collective memory – the programme can help to share innovative practice and expertise across authorities, facilitate collaborative working across city regions and housing market areas, scale-up innovations and drive efficiencies. 95% of London boroughs think that peer networking and sharing best practice would help support their future capacity.⁴⁴

Public Service would run a centrally-based research and development arm, producing analysis, guidance and policy recommendations based on information and observations direct from the coalface of practice. This function has the potential to generate income, in a similar model to a thinktank. It would be resourced through candidates' ongoing personal development, and by candidates between placements.

Case Study: Civic Service

Civic Service is a New York-based initiative that teaches design skills to civil servants to improve how government delivers public services. The programme was founded at the Parsons' DESIS Lab on the basis that the design of better government services has to start with the knowledge, insights and passion of civil servants. The programme has engaged with a community of hundreds of public servants across agency boundaries through 'Forums' with social entrepreneurs working at the intersection of government, design and service innovation, 'Workshops' applying creative and collaborative problem-solving to real public services, and a 'Network' for sharing knowledge and successful projects between government agencies, cities and countries. Civic Service shows how collaborative working across authorities can develop innovative new models of public service.

⁴⁴ [Mayor's Design Advisory Group, *London's Placeshaping Capacity*, 2014](#)

How Public Service would happen

Partnerships

The success of Public Service will depend on the strength of its partnerships – particularly partnerships with public authorities using the programme. Public Service offers a resource that public authorities can opt-in to use at their own discretion; it would not be prescribed. Initially the number of pilot public authorities would be limited to generate a level of competition over being an early adopter of the programme. The corporate commitment of public authorities would need to be secured at the highest level to give candidates a mandate to work across the organisation.

Establishing an ongoing training programme for candidates offers the opportunity for partnerships with relevant university courses (for example the Bartlett, Cass Cities or LSE Cities), and established training providers (for example Urban Design London or Future of London). Private sector practices and leading industry figures may also be willing to provide pro-bono support for training and mentoring. Over the longer-term, training could be extended to officers already working for public authorities. 100% of London boroughs think that additional training for existing staff would help support their future placeshaping capacity.⁴⁵

Cross-sector consultation on these proposals will be critical for getting Public Service right. Industry organisations to be consulted include selected local authorities, universities and private practices, Local Government Association, DCLG, GLA, TfL, Mayor's Design Advisory Group, RIBA, RTPI, The Landscape Institute, Design Council CABE, English Heritage, Future Cities Catapult, Future of London, ATLAS and the Planning Officers Society to name just a few. This could potentially be managed through the emerging PLACE Alliance.

Governance

The consultation process will be used to assemble a cross-sector Steering Group to guide and support the emerging proposals. This group is hoped to include representation from government, local authorities, professional bodies, universities and private practice. Should the project progress to becoming established as an independent organisation, the Steering Group would be superseded by a Board.

At this stage it is proposed the Public Service would be established as an independent social enterprise; a charity, or not-for-profit company

⁴⁵ [Mayor's Design Advisory Group, London's Placeshaping Capacity, 2014](#)

limited by guarantee. Sitting outside government would offer advantages in simplifying recruitment, maintaining an independent relationship with public authorities, and allowing the organisation to be dedicated to this programme. This would of course be subject to legal advice based on the funding structure and procurement arrangements with public authorities. It may make sense for Public Service to initially be incubated by another organisation.

Case Study: Frontline

Frontline is a graduate fast-track programme to attract the best people into one of Britain's toughest professions, children's social work. The idea was first floated in 2010 in an article by former Teach First candidate Josh MacAlister. He secured a £30,000 grant from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation in March 2012 to develop a paper with IPPR, which was presented to the Secretary of State for Education in November 2012 with the support of Lord Adonis. The proposal received cross-party support, and a business case was submitted to the Department for Education in March 2013 which was given formal backing in May 2013 and awarded a grant of £14m over four years through non-competitive tender. Frontline is incubated by the children's charity Ark until the end of its first cohort when it will set up as an independent social enterprise. For their first cohort Frontline received 2,600 applications, of which 104 started in Local Authorities in September 2014. Frontline shows how quickly an idea can be developed into a programme that is already delivering results.

Costs

Public Service will need start-up support and grant funding or direct investment to develop a business case and get off the ground. Once the first cohort are in post public authorities would be covering the full cost of wages, at a cost saving of up to 50% on recruitment through consultants or agency staff. Operational costs, publicity, recruitment and training would be covered through private sector sponsorship and in kind support, and potentially grants. It is anticipated that Public Service could become self-sustaining by the time the first cohort of candidates have completed their placements.

Case Study: On Purpose

On Purpose is a leadership programme to help professionals with a background in corporate business build a career in social enterprise. Associates are paid £21k to undertake two high-profile six month placements in organisations addressing social challenges including social enterprises, charities, and public sector spin-outs. They receive weekly training, fortnightly mentoring and quarterly executive coaching, and become part of a network of emerging leaders making the same transition. Associates have a minimum of two years' experience before

joining, and an average of seven. Placement hosts pay a fee of £5.25k-£10.5k for being part of the programme, the £21k salary of each Associate, and an additional £10.5k-£15.75k if they go on to hire an Associate. On Purpose is an example of a sustainable business model where the costs of placements are covered by placement hosts, but at a rate that is competitive with the market.

Pilot Scheme

A pilot placement scheme is currently being developed with the Greater London Authority, in consultation with London boroughs. This follows the recommendations of the Mayor's Design Advisory Group in response to the findings of a 2014 survey of London's Placeshaping Capacity. Placements would support delivery of the Mayor's priorities for growth by enhancing the capacity of delivery partners, supporting cross-departmental working, and helping to implement mayoral investment. It is anticipated that a recruitment campaign will be run in Autumn 2015 to select an initial cohort of 3-6 place making experts for secondments of 3-12 months to London boroughs. Partner boroughs will be selected through an open call for expressions of interest.

Scaling up

Subject to evaluation of the pilot scheme, it is proposed that Public Service is established as an independent social enterprise and rolled-out across England, with the number of placements increasing gradually with each cohort. In the longer-term there is potential to run an exchange in the other direction, placing public authority officers within private practice and other industry organisations. The programme could also be extended to other countries, developing a wider network of PLACE professionals working within the public sector, and sharing experience and innovation internationally.

Next Steps

1. Launch a London pilot scheme by Autumn 2015.
2. Secure start-up support to establish Public Service as an independent social enterprise.
3. Carry out cross-sector consultation through the PLACE Alliance.
4. Set up the Public Service Steering Group.
5. Write the Public Service Business Plan by Spring 2016.
6. Launch recruitment for the first national cohort by Spring 2017.

Who is behind Public Service

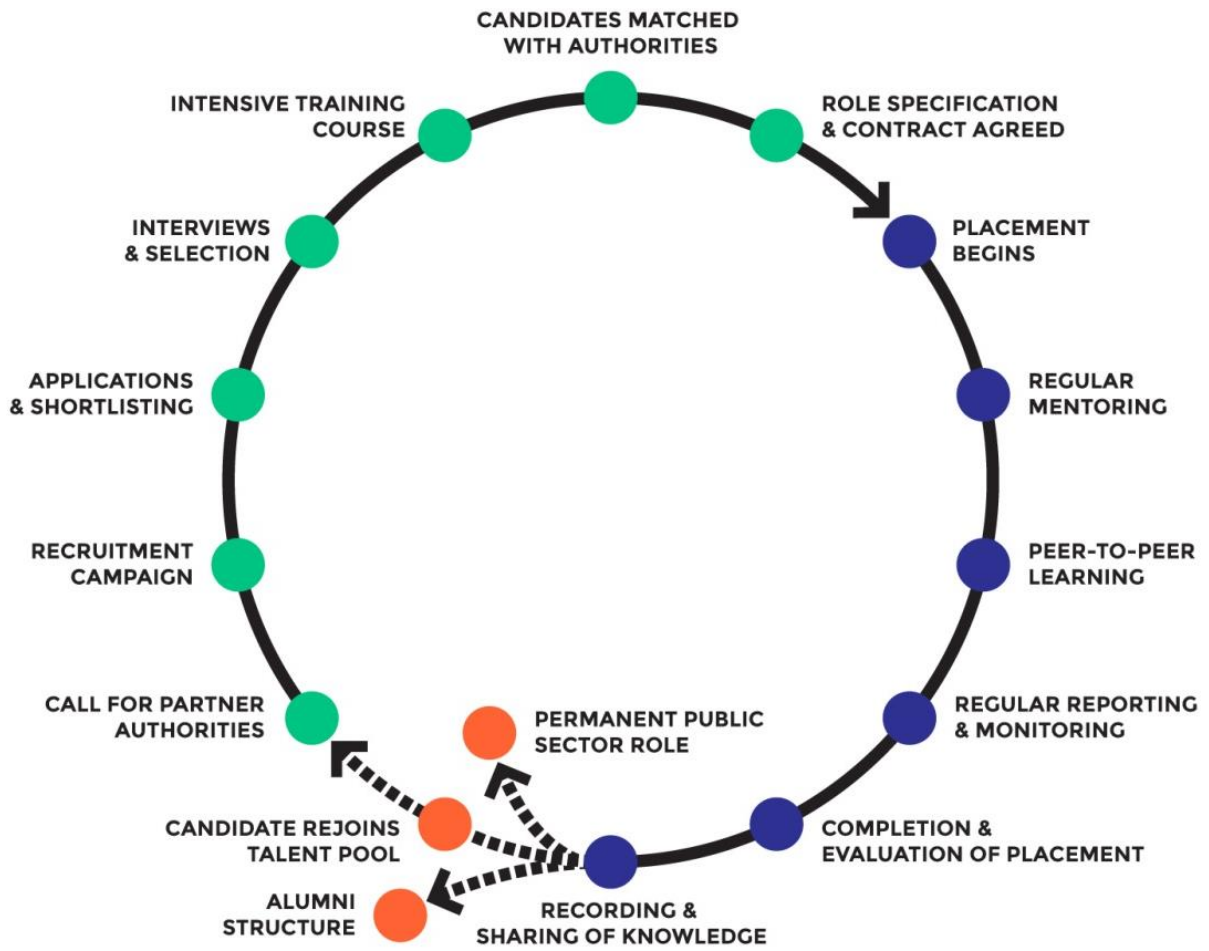
The author

This paper has been written by Finn Williams in an independent capacity, in consultation with practitioners and stakeholders from across the field. Finn Williams is an architect-turned-planner based in London. He studied architecture at the Mackintosh in Glasgow, FAUP in Porto and the Royal College of Art where he was awarded the New London Architecture Prize. He worked for Rem Koolhaas in Rotterdam and General Public Agency before joining Croydon Council's Placemaking team in 2009. Finn graduated from the Future London Leaders programme in 2012 and moved to the Greater London Authority in 2013, where he is Regeneration Area Manager for North West and Central London. In 2014 he started NOVUS, a thinktank for public planning run by public sector planners. Finn is also the founder of Common Office, a platform for independent research on the built environment. He currently teaches at the Royal College of Art, Central Saint Martins, and Bartlett School of Architecture. Finn is a member of the Architectural Review editorial board, a director of the Planning Officers Society, vice chair of the Tower Hamlets Design Review Panel, and trustee of the Friends of Arnold Circus.

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Supporters

The following people have already been informally consulted on the idea and expressed their support: **Lord Adonis** (Shadow Infrastructure Minister); **Colin Haylock** (Past RTPi President, Mayor's Design Advisory Group); **Dan Hill** (Future Cities Catapult); **Daniel Moylan** (Chair of the Mayor's Design Advisory Group); **David Tittle** (MADE, Design Network); **Esther Kurland** (Urban Design London); **Joyce Bridges** (English Heritage, Mayor's Design Advisory Group); **Lord Tyler**; **Lisa Taylor** (Future of London); **Lucy Musgrave** (Publica); **Matthew Carmona** (UCL, Place Alliance); **Mike Kiely** (Croydon Council, Planning Officers Society); **Peter Murray** (New London Architecture; Mayor's Design Advisory Group); **Roberta Blackman-Woods** (Shadow Minister for Communities and Local Government); **Ruth Reed** (RIBA Planning Group Chair, past RIBA President); **Stephen McDonald** (Barnet Council); **Steve Quartermain** (Chief Planner, DCLG); **Sue Vincent** (Urban Design London); **Sunand Prasad** (Past RIBA President; Mayor's Design Advisory Group); **Sir Terry Farrell** (Farrell Review, Mayor's Design Advisory Group); **Tony Fretton** (Tony Fretton Architects, University of East London, The Cass); and **Vincent Lacovara** (Croydon Council).



Illustrative process for Public Service recruitment and placements

