

# LITTLE LEISURE CENTRES AND LIBRARIES IN THE BIG SOCIETY. LSA 2015

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# WE ASK:

- What were the problems volunteer groups faced in asset transfer?
- What support did they need?
- What support could be provided?
- In the context of a critique of the Big Society.



# RECENT ASSET TRANSFER IN LEISURE

- ◉ sports centres, swimming pools and libraries
- ◉ volunteers plan and execute the transfer to trust status themselves
- ◉ take roles of governance and delivery afterwards
- ◉ an alternative to local government closing non-statutory services as a consequence of reduced funding





# IN CONTRAST TO THE FIRST GENERATION OF TRUSTS

- ◉ E.g. SIV, Edinburgh Leisure, Greenwich Leisure
- ◉ major objective to avoid non-domestic rates to central government; and avoid CCT
- ◉ volunteers in governance as trustees; recruited for their expertise
- ◉ transfer to trust status led by paid employees
- ◉ local authority represented on the board
- ◉ BIG and may expand beyond local area

# REVIEW OF 5 YEARS OF THE BIG SOCIETY

Achievements	Negatives
<p>new kinds of partnerships; voluntary sector resilient, and strengthening communities; volunteering remaining high compared to other countries - although at static levels since 2001.</p>	<p>large companies benefiting - bias against the local and voluntary sector; services not sufficiently meeting the needs of those who most need them -exacerbating gaps rich and poor; lack of dialogue to find a way of adapting to budget cuts; power not significantly transferred from the state; failure to establish a strong partnership with the voluntary sector; failure to mobilise the private sector to work for the common good.</p>



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# METHODS

- ◉ Semi-structured interviews with managers and volunteers [sometimes the same person] in 11 facilities (libraries, museums and sports centres) which have transferred from local government to volunteer control and one in an authority which developed volunteers to work alongside employees (2014-15).
- ◉ Review of support and guidance [Sport England, DTS, and N. American]



# EXAMPLE - BRAMLEY BATHS LEEDS



- ◉ A small swimming pool and leisure centre - outskirts of Leeds - built in 1904. Used by local residents and schools for swimming lessons.
- ◉ Opening hours reduced in September 2011 as part of a spending review by Leeds City Council.
- ◉ Local community group established to support the pool in February 2011 and re-opened in January 2013 as an Industrial Provident Society on a 25 year lease from the Council.
- ◉ Houses a public gym, swimming pool, steam room and space for community events, meetings and fitness classes.
- ◉ The trustees are volunteers and paid workers manage the pool and deliver the service.



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# WHAT SUPPORT WAS PROVIDED TO VARYING DEGREES?

- ◉ Guidance and support with establishing legal entity and business plans
- ◉ Mentors who have been through the process.
- ◉ Volunteer development officers - especially in areas of low social capital
- ◉ Advice and support from local authority staff
- ◉ Political goodwill

# SUPPORT - PROVIDED TO VARYING DEGREES

- ◉ Technical training and support
- ◉ Rate relief
- ◉ Favourable leases
- ◉ Assurance that building liabilities will be met
- ◉ Clarity over liabilities arising from previous grants.
- ◉ Redeployment of local authority staff and clarity over application of TUPE regulations.



# SUMMARY

- ◉ our examples are 'little'. individual and small.
- ◉ Oligopoly - Of 161 contracts with local authorities, three operators hold 61%. Sports and Leisure Management; Places for People and Greenwich Leisure Limited. 'predatory trusts'. Is big the default option?
- ◉ Hard to get a national picture in sport
- ◉ In libraries - all small local trusts.

# CONCLUSIONS

- ◉ important supportive role of Volunteer Advice Centres
- ◉ contrast in collaboration government / volunteers
- ◉ has had to be genuine transfer of power
- ◉ Most support is required in most disadvantaged areas. - but it tends to be delivered to demand.



# CONCLUSIONS

- little evidence of businesses showing leadership in committing resources for the common good



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# WHAT CAN WE LEARN - ACTION/SUPPORT?

- ◉ Improve and promote Sports England's asset transfer advice - for local govt as well as volunteers.
- ◉ Facilitate networking for support
- ◉ guidance on TUPE
- ◉ Local to be the default option to promote community engagement
- ◉ volunteer led transfers should be encouraged, rather than discouraged



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# WHAT CAN WE LEARN - ACTION/SUPPORT?

- ◉ Favourable rate relief and lease conditions
- ◉ Technical support and training
- ◉ support from development officers
- ◉ businesses to commit resources for the common good
- ◉ Clarify liability for previous grants



# REALISTICALLY...

- ◉ Most of this costs
- ◉ We are here because of cuts in expenditure
- ◉ We can't develop volunteers to provide a service for all [rather than the advantaged] without support.
- ◉ And this takes time
- ◉ Funds and time are in short supply!





# REFERENCES

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# ANY QUESTIONS?



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