

Curated by Dawn Reeves

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Acknowledgements

The inspiration for this project came from unusually open and explorative conversations with Solace members and Director Graeme McDonald, whose openness and curiosity helped shape the project and our thinking. We'd like to thank everyone that has given the debate such a great start, all our commissioners and the fantastic artists whose creativity makes this work stand out. Thanks to Shared Press collaborators Diana Meale and Chris West, to our brilliant team, designer James Warren and technician Effy Harle and comms Abby Butcher – and to the Solace team for all their support.

Curator – Dawn Reeves and Editor – Fran Collingham www.sharedpress.co.uk

WE'VE GOT THIS
ETHICS, PUBLIC SERVICE AND ART

WE'VE GOT THIS — ETHICS, PUBLIC SERVICE AND ART

WE'VE GOT THIS: ETHICS, PUBLIC SERVICE AND ART

selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, leadership...

In a world where ethics seem opaque how do leaders in public service make sense of standards in public life and ethical dilemmas? Working together in an innovative collaboration with artists, how might we reinterpret the Nolan principles of public life?

These are the challenges we set ourselves when we embarked on our journey to deliver a new response to the Nolan Principles. Exploratory conversations with Solace and chief executives quickly blossomed into lively discussions about ethics, principles and the art that moved people. Poems, paintings, drawings, textiles, sculptures and songs all can say something about our hopes and fears in unique ways – as this exhibition powerfully illustrates.

So why Nolan and why now? The seven principles of public life were first set out by Lord Nolan in 1995 and are included in the Ministerial code to this day. They apply to everyone who works in the public sector – whether they're a frontline social worker, a chief executive, councillor or the Prime Minister. The world is vastly different to the one we knew 25 years ago. But the principles still hold true. We all want to do the right thing, but it can be tricky. Our personal and organisational challenges and decisions affect others and impact on society.

And why art – in a setting where you never usually see art? We all know it's good for us as individuals. It gives us the opportunity to express ourselves in different ways, to stretch and engage different parts of the brain. There's increasing evidence of the links between art and good mental health. It helps us make sense of the challenges of place, makes connections that we haven't seen before, can make us question – and it enlivens the soul. And, for senior public leaders – used to putting a stoical face on things when the going gets extremely tough – it can put the personal and interior into a public context.

It makes links between different people with different views, interests and ideas about the world. The artists we worked with had never heard of the Nolan Principles. Why should they? But they all grasped the importance of them, understood the power of taking the right ethical choices and, working with chief executives, interpreted the principles in ways that everyone can connect with. There's a long and proud history of public service leading the way in art and culture. All our towns and cities have public art and publicly funded creative spaces – and room for more. Art and culture in all its forms has always directly explored aspects of society, politics and the world we live in. We know that cultural life and engagement with it makes our towns and cities better places to live. Although these interpretations of the seven principles of public life are deeply personal to the people who commissioned the artwork, they have lessons for us all.

When we began this project we wondered how people would react to what could be seen as a pretty abstract piece of thinking. But actually, everyone got it immediately. Our commissioners – some of whom thought they weren't arty at all – talked passionately and powerfully about the art that moved them. When we bought them together with their artists the story they wanted to tell immediately resonated with them. In a sector where partnership working is an essential part of the day job, these unusual partnerships stand out as special.

We want this exhibition and the stories that go with it to be the beginning of something bigger. We want people who visit the exhibition think about and talk about the visual stories the art tells. We want people to stop, think, take a breath and remember why they're here and why what they do still matters – more than ever.

We've already had interest from councils who want to host the exhibition (so get in touch if you'd like to find out more) and we know there's more to explore in this area.

We've got this is about the heart of public service. It's about why we do what we do.

Dawn Reeves

GLIMPSE

Paul Najsarek – commissioner

The first goal for leadership in a democracy, in times of deep divisions, is whether we can stand being in the same room together, to really hear what each other has to say even when we disagree. In my role it's about holding the space to be able to do that, we need people to come to the table and to stay. It might sound counterintuitive, but uncertainty and ambiguity aren't the enemies of clarity. Differentiation and diversity of thought can help us work through what we mean, to adapt and move on.

If we can get this right, there's the potential for an even more ambitious goal. I think Nolan asks us to glimpse not only a shared respectful space but a shared vision. Of course, there are days when there's no common ground and you feel like you might be run down from both directions. It can be like a family, there's love but sometimes you can't stand each other. If we can get through the fog of complexity, there might be a place of unity. It's a rich and tantalising aim, one I think we all hanker for. How capable we are of getting there is the question. For me, the dialogue is everything.

Gillian Lever – artist

My work is influenced by Rothko – the American painter, a shared interest with Paul. In planning this piece I thought about the non-denominational Rothko Unity Chapel, a beautiful and safe place that reminds visitors of universal questions, invites us to take a breath and to look slowly at the surroundings. The effect is tenderising, it helps us to respond.

www.gillianlever.org



BECONTREE REVISITED

Chris Naylor – commissioner

I was 21 when the Nolan Principles of Public Life were published. They didn't mean a great deal to me at the time. To be frank, most of my generation couldn't see past the daily torrent of political sleaze, the abuse of power and privilege. We wanted shut of the lot of them. A list of rules - many of which seemed to be pretty obvious, didn't really cut it.

I grew up in Rotherham, South Yorkshire, in the 70s and 80s. In the conventional sense there wasn't a great deal of power or privilege. Nevertheless, I went on to be the kid in the local paper that won a place at Cambridge. At the time I was proud, but years later working in East London, watching as one or two of our brightest kids each year also found themselves in the local paper with their A Levels certificates and a passport to Oxbridge, it's been hard for that pride not to turn to anger. Anger that they like me, will arrive at college to find a university full of young people for whom it would have been news had they not won a place. It shouldn't have been news that a kid from Rotherham was off to Cambridge in 1991, and it certainly shouldn't be news today for youngsters from Dagenham.

My family are northern Methodists. We include plumbers, butchers, musicians, metallurgists, non-conformist lay preachers, lots of teachers, and an artist. In my house there was always music. The emancipating joy of music was everywhere: Sibelius; Debussy; Delius; Brahms and Holst became the soundtrack to my liberation. There were pivotal civic institutions too – schools, littered as they were, with temporary classrooms, but amongst the chaos, that teacher who saw potential and offered encouragement. The Central Library with the Financial Times, the Economist, and place to sit, and silence. And while the paternalist state played its part as best it could, as important was the wider fellowship of church, the scouts, and the youth orchestra on a Thursday night. In fellowship there was love, and through love there was hope.

My experiences, personal and professional have made sense of the plea by William Morris for an integrated society in which everything made by man should be beautiful. That insistence on beauty as a central goal, often so absent in the apparent wisdom and certainty of the 'expert bureaucrat state', reveals modern approaches to welfare and care that lack an essential nobility. Reaffirmed

in The Dream of John Ball, Morris wrote 'Forsooth, brothers, fellowship is heaven, and lack of fellowship is hell; fellowship is life, and lack of fellowship is death; and the deeds that ye do upon the earth, it is for fellow-ship's sake ye do them, and the life that is in it, that shall live on and on for ever, and each one you part of it, while many a man's life upon the earth from the earth shall not wane.'

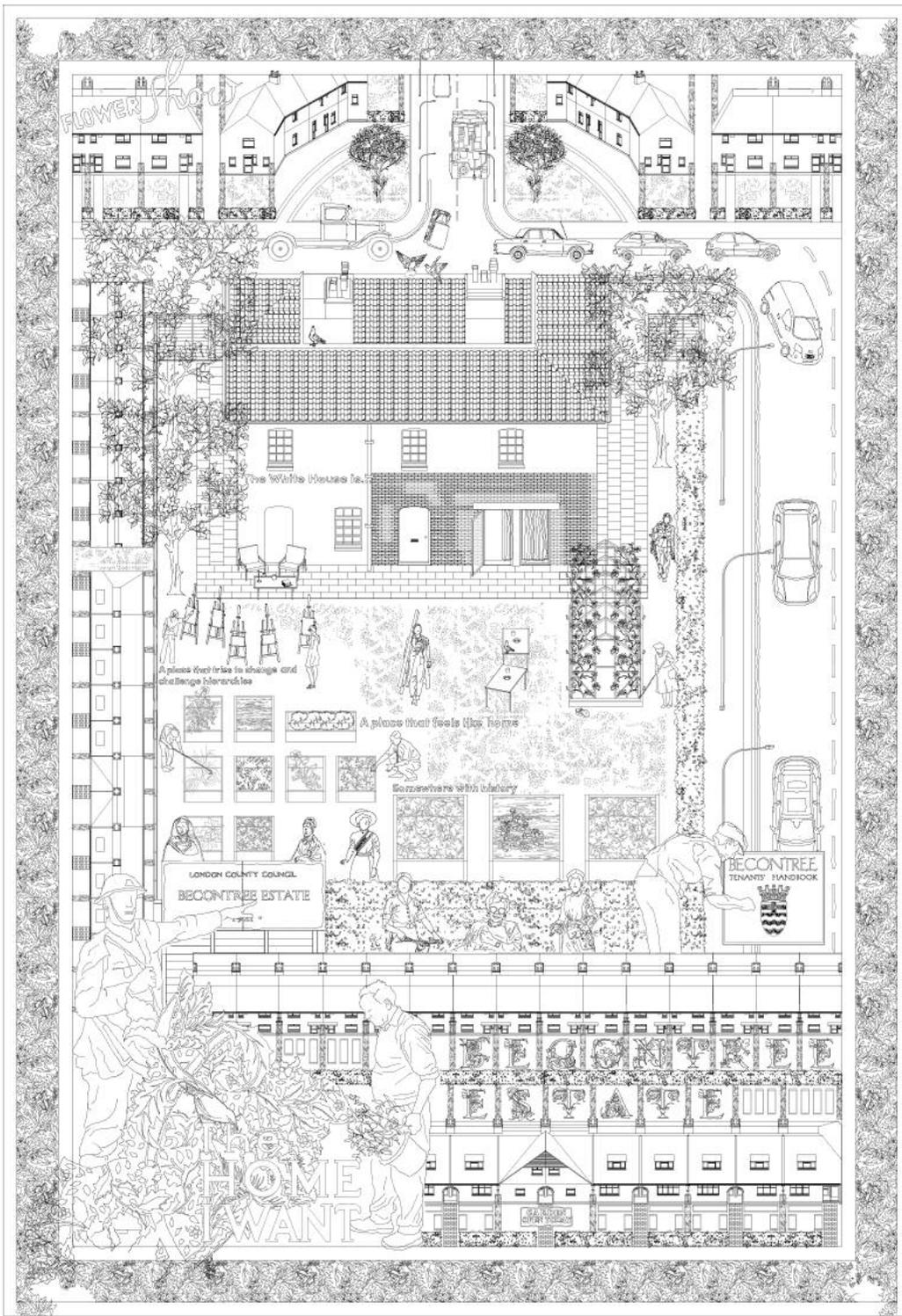
As the 21st century approaches the quarter way mark, isn't it obvious that public life should be about tackling deficits of power, not exploiting them? Do we need a rulebook to say structural inequality harms people, diminishes us all and must be our collective goal to address? I hope not. I'm not naïve, it's a mission that is economic, societal and political. It requires leadership. It demands us to be angry and consequently purposeful. But it is an anger that can tamed and put to good effect. Tamed by hope, by faith and love, and fellowship, and beauty.

Jess Philips – artist

The piece focuses on the Becontree Estate with the centrepiece of the drawing examining and showcasing the tremendous White House, an 18th century farmhouse brought back to life as a pioneering public space for art and social activity. The house embodies strength and fellowship, and a faith in local communities that is often overlooked and undervalued. The estate itself provided an escape from overcrowded slums, homes for WWI heroes, Ford workers and a place to grow fruit and veg. The detail in my work shows a different perception of the East End, one where everyone can make history.

The drawing nods to the original intentions of the Becontree estate which offered homes for heroes of the first world war and jobs, often at the local Ford factory or in the city. It was a haven for people escaping the overcrowded slums of London, giving them a place to grow their own fruit and vegetables. I included the WWI soldier, the White House gardener, artists and volunteers at the White House and historical female figures such as a midwife, suffragette, an abbess of Barking Abbey, Jo Richardson, Labour politician, Elizabeth Fry, the prison reformer and Edith Cavell. The detail in my work shows a different perception of the East End, one where everyone can make history.

Instagram: @jess_j_philips



THIS WINDOW, THIS CIVIC WINDOW

Sarah Norman – commissioner

My first stint in local government was in the late 80s and 90s (as both an officer and an elected member) when the impact of Thatcherism on local government had taken its toll. My return was in 2008, just as austerity was beginning to kick in. My metaphor for my role, the image that stays with me, is a dented shield. The metaphor has taken on a greater resonance as I've moved into senior management roles and have found myself seeking to protect the organisation as well as communities – not only from austerity but from the pressure to do the easy thing or the popular thing, rather than the right thing.

The Nolan principles help, they are still relevant. They help me navigate the choppy waters, avoid the blame culture and the JFDI demands that stop us looking after people, thinking long-term, or ignoring the complexities of life. And even when openness and transparency mean aspects of my own life become fair game for lazy journalism or point scoring, I take it on the chin. The principles matter.

We are responsible to our communities, as staff, as managers, as councillors. And we're responsible to each other. We're part of our places, in the best and worst of times. What keeps me going is that I want to make a difference. We all do.

Ian Mcmillan – poet

I was born in 1956 in the village near Barnsley where I still live; I wanted to be a writer all the way through my schooldays, but I wasn't sure how to go about it. All the books I got out of the library were written by people who lived in Surrey, not the Yorkshire Coalfield.

I've been very excited to be a Trustee of Barnsley Museums and Heritage Trust and also to support our new library support @TheLightbox; it's a shining light for the town and the borough for years to come, a lighthouse guiding us to the safe harbour of language, learning and fun.

I remember our conversation about the Nolan principles vividly. It felt real and didn't gloss over the difficult aspects of austerity. That was important to me.

www.ian-mcmillan.co.uk



Openness

I SEE, I HEAR, I FEEL

Kersten England – commissioner

We need to go beyond Nolan, to use a different language and different languages. I'd like to see us focusing on the spirit of the principles and keeping in mind that they are "of the people" and "for the people." 21st century governance should be about the greater good. The words matter – tolerance and goodwill are important here.

Ethical challenges are an art not a science. The challenges for us are around harnessing energies and allowing people to live their own lives. Identity and migration are big issues for everyone, we live in difficult and contested times. I try to think inside and outside, individual and collective. Like many people in the district migration is part of my family's story. We are learning and growing as a place. There are more female leaders now. Our city park brings everyone together. It's about touching people's lives.

Shazia Bibi – poet

Bradford is built on the journeys people have made from all over the world. People here have always carried their resilience with them through any prejudice or difficult socio-economic times. We are a city of travellers, traders and immigrants. It's a place for those who want to create, make and grow.

When national leaders openly use discriminatory language, their behaviour puts a question mark on morality, ethics and trust in British politics. Our city is a compassionate place. With humanity and honesty at the forefront of our decisions, we can lead with an open mind to help each other when in need.

www.shaziabibi.com



My family and yours
We seek and shall find
A home in England
A home in Bradford
We have been on long jannies
Flights, ferries, trains, buses and taxis
then the smogged air hits our face
people of all identities
Laughing, stinging, some together- some separate
Sweet delicacies from Pakistan and Scotland
Our home, Bradford
the youngest city
We are people

who have, in all it's tragedies.

Me and you - we are alike
Some food, some shelter some love, please
Can we become truth seekers and hand holders?

Act with honesty
Speak with kindness
like a thread, woven in Cotton

Can we all walk together, sometime longer
People seeking a life of quality

Humanity above greed, in this beautiful city

I am enough
You are enough

We are enough
Let's lead the way together

With truth and forbitude
I am just like you
I see
I hear
I feel
I hope



FRUIT AND FLOWERS

Ian Thomas – commissioner

I think the Nolan principles have served society well. However, I also applaud the brave challenge to rethink the standards in contemporary public life. For me there is a fundamental omission of a critical word: respect. I grew up a child of Jamaican parents and having respect and manners was always a big deal. There was a red line of treating people the way you wished to be treated, it remains to this day.

Social media has given disrespectful behaviours an accessible platform, one that's vivid and damaging to a broad range of people, some who are incredibly vulnerable. The mask of the anonymous profile permits people to inflict hate on others who are different, and it has a growing impact on our day to day lives. Whether we communicate from behind the digital mask or not, engagement in a respectful and courteous manner needs to be in much sharper focus.

Amy Gillies – artist

I sought to highlight the importance of respect by reimagining Jan van Huysum's 1722 original painting Fruit and Flowers. Unlike the original, my work on polythene has been cropped to the correct format for Instagram. It's ready made for viewers to snap, inviting engagement, in contrast to the intention of the original to display wealth, privilege and status. And yet while organisations and galleries seek to unite audiences, social media competitiveness also risks dividing us.

I made my painting using quick movements, the image is distorted, appearing uncared for. Art lovers may find this depiction disrespectful. The technique acts as a mirror to society in this sense. Whether in galleries or audiences online, it is critical for our interactions to be respectful to individuals, to the institutions and to the artworks or content themselves.

Instagram: [@amygilliesart](#)



FIREWORKS

Becky Shaw

I spent a pivotal phase of my career working at Westminster City Council for Bill Roots, an extraordinary Chief Executive who has the Nolan principles running in his veins. Always doing the right thing, relentlessly and cleverly. The production of the first edition of the Code of Governance with him was a privilege, even when the first full draft was lost in an ICT disaster. Embedding it in practice in the organisation was an adventure.

That experience, combined with the public service values I was raised with, have hard coded in me the importance of practical good governance. We are public servants spending public money hard earned by others and we need to do so thoughtfully, keeping the most vulnerable at the core of what we do.

I love fireworks, they are important to my family and to East Sussex and this picture uses them to capture the hard work and the double-edged nature of governance. A lack of effective governance can lead to headline grabbing failure, but when we get it right, we can do spectacular things.

Kate Adam – Project Artworks

Very few of the artist and makers we work with would fully understand the Nolan Principles which I came across again quite recently and like very much. But everyone we work with has these principles to the core and it is a key defining feature of the way they interact with the world and the art they make.

The direct way in which people engage with materials is unencumbered by the weight of cultural assimilation.

Darryl Spencer, our artist here, likes to paint using expressive and repetitive movements, rapidly covering his picture surface.

www.projectartworks.org



WHEN ALL ELSE MELTS AWAY

Anne-Marie Bond – commissioner

We come to work in the public sector to make a real difference and we give our all, in time, energy and enthusiasm, to achieve this. We are innovative, adaptable and forward thinking, yet there are many things that can derail us.

Increased demand and significantly reduced resources challenge us in ways that were not contemplated when the Nolan Principles were first established. The level of criticism which becomes unfairly personal, partisan and abusive, particularly through social media, is similarly a very different challenge than those envisaged by Lord Nolan, and talented people are leaving public services as a result at a time when they are needed the most.

Despite this, when stripped back to the core (or the lollipop stick!) in my opinion the Nolan Principles remain relevant to ensuring standards in public life are maintained.

Cath Long – artist

My practice involves print, stitch and 3D work. I frequently work in collaboration with others and draw on a wide range of influences. In thinking about this piece, I focused on Anne-Marie's commitment to the Nolan principles, together with her strong attachment to place – she grew up in and loves the beautiful coastal area she now works in. This led me to the idea of ice lollies.

When you look past all of the day to day headaches of dealing with budget cuts, new procedures and angry people on social media asking why things haven't been done... when those things can be melted away, at heart the core principles still apply.

Insta: [@catherine_rhiannon_long](#)



Honesty

Integrity

Selflessness

Openness

Accountability

Leadership

Objectivity

EMPOWERED

Hayley Barsby – commissioner

My mum worked as a housing assistant in the council and wouldn't judge people for their circumstances. It was one of the things she said: "You're no better than anyone else." I see the direct influence my mum's moral core has had. If I blamed a homeless person's situation on themselves, I know my housing officers will see that and start modelling the same behaviour. I'm demonstrating values, aware of the ripples and the connections. I try to be how we want to be as an organisation and as a place.

Our town, largely built on mining, engineering and manufacturing, needs a new identity and a new purpose. We need a fundamental shift in thinking, people here want what they had in the past. There's fear when we need to generate an energy and agency, excitement for the future. Nolan ought to include ambition, to guide our futures. Seeing things differently helps – looking for hidden meanings, subverting the old stories. If we imagine things differently, we could learn to fly.

Szilvia Ponyiczki – artist

I believe that art can be a catalyst for individual and cultural transformation, enhance human potential and promote the individual and common good. My paintings are developed through the creative exploration and adaptation of Jungian and archetypal psychology, addressing the collective challenges and opportunities of our moment in history. My work delves into the symbolism, messages and representation of dreams.

I believe that dream representation can take us back to that lost ancient knowledge of mankind, make the human unconscious accessible; showing us what we do not know, what we do not notice.

Dreams can help us to gain better insight into problems, offer new and creative solutions, and lead to a new way of thinking. During sleeping our brain has access to both the personal and the collective unconscious. This inner world of ours, where a higher intelligence resides, can be a source of imaginative wisdom and understanding. Looking for the latent content of dreams, interpreting the messages of this symbolic language gives us the opportunity to find the meaning of life, to make full use of our potential.

www.ponyiczki.co.uk



SOME VILLAGE — HAMPDEN

Dawn Reeves – commissioner

We absolutely need to talk more about the spirit of public service, the impact it has on making society function for all of us. Hope for me comes in the excellent, brave and innovative work done in local government in difficult circumstances. If we don't focus on hope, we end up cynical. And if we're not open about the horror, the grit and the dark side, we're in danger of being naïve or wilfully blind.

It's not easy to hold both the good and the bad in our hands at the same time but it's ethics – and talking about them – that help guide us through the situations when the absolute opposites are true. In local government we invest and make cuts, so it helps to have structure and flexibility, compliance and creativity. And I found working in a political environment hard. Politics (big and small p) is too often a win-lose situation when society needs us to work for a win-win.

All real stories have nuance, tensions that pull us in different directions – it's the stuff of life. We have to hold true to the principles and find new ways to talk about situations prevent us from doing that. New words, and some old, help that.

Liz Broadley – artist

The words in this doorstep recall situations and dilemmas of public service. They are variously celebratory, cautionary, practical, tub-thumpingly worthy and ambivalent. On the outside is Thomas Gray's tribute to the sort of unshowy public service that is brave and beautiful and keeps a lid on it. At first, I'd planned to sew up the lid because the doorstep started life as a grumpy comment about self-promotion in public life. Then I realised – more fool me – I had sewn a great big retweet and I needed to get over myself. This is a conference of public servants with important things to share.

So please, when you're looking at the doorstep, rummage about in the doorstep and pull out the words for a closer look and, in the absence of post-its, please write your favourite lines on the calico bandages provided.



Proud people breed
Sad sorrows for
themselves



Sweet moderation, heart of the nation

Conscience doth make cowards of us all

Of reason not the most, our longest days
Are in the poorest things superfluous
Allow not nature more than nature needs
Man's life is cheap as beasts

WANTED ON BOARD

Ian Fytche – commissioner

'Rectam Viam Sequi' – to follow the right path – is the motto of North Kesteven District Council. It echoes the geography of the area and the ancient Roman roads that cross it. It's a motto that says something profound about the council and the way it does things.

The council has big plans for the district, plans that home in on the local economy, the local housing market, the quality of the environment, the ongoing development of our communities, and the delivery of local public services. Plans that drive ambition to enable communities to flourish. Plans that make a difference for the lives of everyone who lives and works in North Kesteven. They speak to the principle that nobody wins unless everybody wins.

The road to any destination is important. It's not okay to follow any old road – the end does not justify the means. The choices we make about the journeys we take say something about who we are and what makes us tick. Those choices say something about our values, and the ethical framework within which we operate. The Nolan principles and the public service values they embody are, in some important ways, as old as the Roman roads that cross North Kesteven, and yet perhaps our commitment to selflessness, integrity, objectivity, openness, honesty and leadership is more important than it has ever been.

The values define the paths we take and the choices we make, choices about ambition, investment, and partnership building. They offer signposts along the road, and when we celebrate what we have achieved, we need to celebrate the inclusive and positive values that guided our path. They are why we do what we do.

Richard Knight – artist

My idea focused on the motto Rectam Viam Sequi, 'Follow the right road'. It uses upcycled road signs and plays on metaphors around direction and route, questions of "where are we heading?" and how to attain and preserve Nolan's seven principles. I've packed a lot of meaning into the seven signs that make up this package, it's intended as a constant work in progress', a reference point to keep on board at all times.

Richard Knight's arts practice has developed over a period of forty years, particularly in community arts in Lincolnshire. He was recently Artist In Residence at the NCCD. He is an experienced performer, graffiti artist, and a collaborator in a variety of fields. He teaches film studies, writes for Shindig! and broadcasts a twice-monthly FM radio show. His work combines a street edge with a painterly aesthetic.

Instagram: [@dimjerky](#)



MARK VS THE SYSTEM

Mark Rogers – commissioner

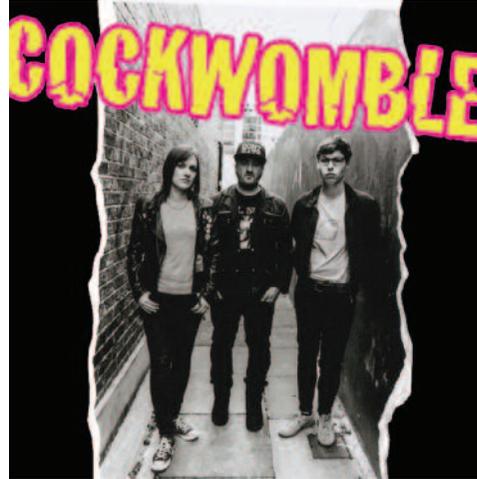
There is an important debate that still isn't widely underway (or, it would seem, widely welcomed). One through which we should be building a new ethical framework – where Nolan-esque principles combine with collective purpose, bravery and, crucially, a new accountability (I did this for you, not for me). Something transcending the decadent tribalism and ill-concealed self-interest that has become the zeitgeist.

Instead, aspire to a collective empowerment of people: recognising that custodianship is NOT 9/10 of the law. That's how we rebuild trust, imagine new futures and then see them realised.

Cockwomble – artist

We were struck by the paradox at the heart of this project. It seems as if the Nolan principles are very much 'motherhood and apple pie', and yet still needed writing (and rewriting). They certainly haven't been completely adhered to since. Trying to alter a system for the better you are often met with strong resistance. Yet despite this, the system of local government in the UK is broadly a positive thing.

www.cockwombleband.com



IF I WAS SITTING HERE

Merran Mcrae – commissioner

I talk about pragmatism a lot, referring to what's logical and legal. I see myself as a sorter – when there's a problem, I focus on how I can put it right. My first graduate job in local government was in the housing and homelessness department, I learnt a lot and I'm not afraid of tackling big complex issues.

So much of what communities see around them doesn't seem fair and so much is subjective. There's Nolan and our individual moral codes, I regularly check in with myself and am prepared to stand my ground when things just don't seem like the right thing to do. We can't slavishly follow the rules when the situation changes and policies can ossify. I worry that in the digital age, with AI and predictive data, we're in danger of losing our ethical stance.

We need to see the rich and varied strengths in our communities. As individuals and organisations, we need to be more creative, imagine the future, spot patterns, make the invisible visible.

Helen Thomas and Tony Wade – artists

We wanted the piece to have a tactile and useful quality; something with a function rather than simply a decorative piece. Our collaboration on the work included Merran in its making.

The abstracted patchwork design is inspired by Merran's thoughts on how the Nolan Principles can be woven into the fabric of local government and help shape and support communities, it incorporates words and phrases chosen by Merran. The image represents a harmonious interweaving of elements that can be read as buildings (residential, commercial and industrial), gardens, fields, waterways, allotments, paths, roads and sky.

Helen Thomas www.toastedorange.co.uk

Tony Wade www.tonywadeart.com



ACT WISELY

Robin Tuddenham – commissioner

It's a time to return to the Nolan principles of public life, but long before they were ever imagined, Halifax built a town hall, designed by Charles Barry, the architect of the Houses of Parliament, which opened to the public in 1863. Above the entrance were inscribed two words – Act Wisely.

If we aspire for meaningful public services for the next twenty to thirty years, let's reclaim that sense of where we began, and what brought local government into being in the first place. Our history is written in words on the ceiling of the Council Chamber – truth, honour, probity and justice. Like the Nolan principles, those words are important. They still resonate with us, but we've crafted a new vision, we've got a new song to sing.

Our vision of place is short, maybe the shortest vision anywhere, just five words. Those words define the place we want to be – enterprising, talented, distinctive, resilient and kind. Words that speak truth and integrity, but also capture our spirit of doing our own thing, feisty, bloody awkward, a punky spirit.

What you see isn't always what you get. Nolan didn't talk about kindness, but it's one of our principles of public life. Looking out for each other, communities setting up circles of support, the response to the floods, we can be bloody minded and tough, giving love, but saying it like it is. Clever folk going out into the world, full of hope, but we want more of our people to live that larger life.

Coming up to ten years here these values run deep for me. We are changed by where we live, my voice gets heard, but as part of a wider set of voices some previously ignored, forgotten. I experienced late onset of speech as a child, I am still able to recall that sense of not being understood, being detached, sidelined. I never take for granted the privilege of voice, the power and joy of words, spoken from the heart.

Our vision is built upon all our voices, not top down and centrally imposed like Nolan. We share, exchange and broker meaning, sometimes we just have a bit of a row. But we can't be ignored, we are loud, we expect to be held to account. Now is the time to do it.

Keiron Higgins – poet

Keiron, a local punk poet, embraces the words, full of pride, in and about Halifax, a town back on its feet, but still edgy. Facing the dark, but emboldened by culture, art, a decent coffee, and the warm sound of new vinyl on the turntable.

@keironhiggspoet



DRINK UP

Janice Robinson – commissioner

Saying the right and then doing the right thing, the actual behaviours, that's where the Nolan principles and our values come into their own. Joint working has been challenging here, we're working with cultural and generational differences. What's helped is a robust, transparent process, one that takes the time it needs to be inclusive.

I grew up on a farm, we had to be disciplined to look after the animals. Things have to be done the right way at the right time. It could feel pretty constraining for a curious kid, so when I had the opposite experience staying with a family without boundaries, it was a culture shock and I felt the need for guidance.

Systems are there for a reason, structure helps when you want to make change. The machinery of governance supports our behaviours. But it's the honesty and trust you build up over time that make things change. Like life, it's a work in progress, there was a lot of anxiety and there's now some satisfaction, we're turning a big corner.

Emma Buckmaster – potter and printmaker

This is about the everyday nature of these principles and their place in our daily lives. Mugs are a familiar item that we are in daily contact with – there is no sense of artistic separation and elitism. The principles need to be a similarly familiar source of support to those working in public service. Each unique mug is impressed with either one of the seven Nolan Principles of Public Life or an additional interpretation of these ideas, suggested by colleagues at the council. This gives a personal feeling and individuality to the piece which makes it harder to ignore. These mugs are for use by people in public life. I would love this project to move forward with help from other potters around the country.

Emma studied at the Cambridge School of Art and completed her MA there. She now exhibits internationally and runs specialist courses and artist demonstrations. Her work is included in the collection of the V&A Museum and has been exhibited there in conjunction with the Woodland Trust. She featured in the BBC documentary about the Royal Academy of the Arts and her work was included again in this year's Summer Exhibition.

www.emmabuckmaster.com



Every artist and commissioner approached their brief in a different way and with different things they wanted to say about the challenge. But clear and common themes have emerged – a golden thread that could lead to the evolution of a new way...

The collaborations reveal the **fundamental humanity** of public servants. Showing up as real people (and not just where it feels safe), subject to the same oscillations and ravages as anyone else, not in grey but in technicolour, engaging with others as humans, hearing and speaking a language that connects – an ethical imperative for leaders at all levels.

Bringing the why we do what we do into the light. Our public service spirit is what builds trust and confidence in public institutions – and we've never needed this more. Our colleagues and our communities need to be reminded that from a strong ethical core we gain resilience. It's how we hold difference and diversity and move towards a common vision. And there's an extension to the making a difference mantra that runs through many of these conversations – **purpose and empowerment**. If we're not addressing need in our work is that ethical? Ethics guide our decision-making, so shouldn't a new ethical approach focus on the impact of our work on disadvantage, agency and self-determination?

We all want a **vision of the future** that generates energy and potential. We need to think through and factor in how we support and make sense of identities. And the ethical challenge on AI and predictive data, the ability to be curators of data and intelligence that means our futures are in our own control is key.

We don't need centrally imposed dictats of motherhood and apple pie. **Our ethical heart has a local beat**, distilled into local language, based on experience and recognisable to everyone. Values need to be internal, organisational and external and have a shared sense of what we mean by ethics here, in our place.

And we've got all this... can we get there? Have we got a system of governance that matches up? Does the machinery support new behaviours?

If we show up as real people, as we've done here, we have the right to be respected. *We model how we want to interact and we're clear that's what's wrong is wrong. And that means we all, including politicians, should sign up to that and be protected when we call things out. If we get the values and behaviours right, then what we design organisationally – heavy lifting though that may be – will get us there.*

We've got this! Confidence and spirit, purpose and heart.



“This exhibition is stunning. Chief executives and artists have been collaborating to start a new debate about ethics and principles in local government. In these difficult times where ethics can seem opaque at best, a creative approach makes us engage and think in different ways. We’ve got this – is about the heart of public service, it’s about why we do what we do.”

Martin Swales, President Solace, Chief Executive, South Tyneside Council

“We need a creative conversation about Nolan, public service and what that means for us in these challenging times. It’s been fantastic to work with local artists on the project. As individuals and organisations, we need to be more creative, imagine the future, spot patterns, make the invisible visible.”

Merran McRae Chief Executive Wakefield Council

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