



# Slivers of time

***A new type of worker is emerging argues Richard Manby. People who sell "Slivers-of-Time" around other commitments in their life want to work in short bursts, often at short notice. Could they be the backbone of future service delivery?***

It's a typical day at Anyplace Council. Leaves have fallen during a windy night and need to be cleared as quickly as possible. Meanwhile, a sunny morning means today's half term rush at the Leisure Centre will be heightened and an event in the local park will require 20 more stewards this afternoon.

How will council managers cope? Typically they'll call round potential extra staff that may come in. Or they'll look to their agency to do the same. It's a time consuming, overhead-laden process with a high risk the individuals who are booked won't show up.

But imagine life for the managers if motivated, reliable, workers could be booked exactly as required, hour-by-hour, with minimal overhead, with an hour or less notice. Leaves could be swept up across the area before mid-morning by additional street staff deployed for just 3 hours. Extra lifeguards would be booked as the admissions queue lengthened. Decisions about numbers of stewards in the park could be made comfortably on the morning of the event.

This sort of responsiveness is becoming a reality. A new generation of websites run by recruitment agencies allow any verified worker to list the individual hours, day-to-day, when

they wish to work, on their own terms. The success rate of their bookings is monitored. Consistently reliable people soon command a premium hourly rate. In this world it becomes economical for employers to induct groups of these "Slivers-of-Time" workers so they then have a pool of pre-trained top-up staff constantly on hand.

Government research shows 13.7m people need to work this way in the UK at some point each year. Think, for example, of lone parents, carers, job-seekers, the partially employed, those with medical commitments, anyone starting their own enterprise, students and the newly retired. They work for a variety of employers who need top-up workers for peak periods such as caterers, retailers, logistics companies, contact centres and, of course, local authorities.

In East London, Slivers-of-Time workers have been a reality for the last 18 months. Twelve other areas of the UK are following



with a launch of their own marketplace for "spare hours" in the next 6 months. The TUC have investigated and promoted this new way of working, so great is the need of people with pressing life commitments that prevent them holding down a job, however flexible. Launch was funded by ODPM (now Communities & Local Government).

A marketplace for Slivers-of-Time can be launched anywhere where there is the initial pool of work to get it off the ground. Typically it requires £100,000 worth of local work over its first year. That engages a first block of sellers who prove themselves and become increasingly attractive to a wide range of employers. As those organisations start buying, the market brings in more individuals with spare hours to sell and a virtuous circle can take hold.

Local authorities have much to gain from being the initial buyer in this new market. Not just as a way of helping local people do "bits of work" while meeting the short term need for extra staff. There is a future path for authorities who engage with this new

marketplace. Handing over local control of services can be as simple as issuing a buyer's password, for example to the Parish Council who need to buy local street wardens as and when problems occur. Spending controls are immediate, auditing is transparent and paperless. Purchasing decisions can be instantly reported to residents through the council's website.

In further developments, these workers can become the spine for services attuned completely to user's needs. The idea is to increasingly combine a 9-5 workforce with a 24/7 on-call local talent base, that could have been trained in multiple council related types-of-work, and is booked exactly as needed. Other employers will be buying their hours as well. The individual who does some parking enforcement for their council in the morning could then be helping a local café during its lunchtime rush and getting a local supermarket through the post-school rush later. The individual will be working at the times of their choosing, based on their personal rate calculation rules (go too high and you won't get any bookings) and gaining a depth of variety and experience no conventional employment can offer.

Further information: [www.sliversoftime.com](http://www.sliversoftime.com)

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