

# Preparing for Localism and the Big Society

**A Community in Action**

*Wyre Strategic Partnership*



## August 2010

## Growing the Big Society

In a speech July 20th in Liverpool the Prime Minister [announced plans for developing his "Big Society" reforms](#), including setting up a Big Society Bank to help finance social enterprises, charities and voluntary groups. The Bank will be funded using dormant bank and building society account money allocated to England. Whitehall will make available officials from the Department of Communities and Local Government to help with any bureaucratic or legal problems and identify and fund trained community organisers to work with local groups. The PM claimed the plans, which include private sector investment, would mean "hundreds of millions of new finance to some of our most dynamic social organisations."

The Big Society consists of 3 strands:

1. **Public Sector reform** – what the state can do for us.

The principle underlying public sector reform is to move away from a single source of help, delivered by a unitary state and ruled by a monolithic public sector to communities of shared interests, which act in their own way to achieve those interests

2. **Community empowerment** – what can we do for ourselves

3. **Philanthropic action** - what we can do for others

They are entwined but distinct.

There are 3 basic methods by which the government can act to build the Big Society

1. **Decentralisation** – the redistribution of power – ‘people want an empowering state not a controlling state...Government today has got to put the power in the hands of people....that’s not a slogan, it’s actually a demand from the public’<sup>1</sup>

The emphasis here is that central government are saying that there is no agenda other than to learn how best they can help each community achieve their own version of the Big Society. The 4 vanguard areas have been chosen by David Cameron are pursuing projects of their own devising originating from demands of the community and taking on a blend of powers and responsibilities most appropriate to their priorities.

Central government are seeing the role of local government as facilitators of their own community priorities and empowerment, not rolling out central government policies.

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<sup>1</sup> Tony Blair

Replication of projects in other areas is encouraged, but through communities identifying what works and demanding it in their borough.

The emphasis is on starting out small. When you help a few people in your borough, the replication of this approach can lead to helping thousands.

'For those considering becoming involved in a social business, you don't have to wait. You can see the impact right away- not on the whole of society, but a portion of it.....it's not necessary to wait to see the impact on millions of people. Million is a big number. But if your work has a positive impact on five or ten people, you have invented a seed. Now you can plant it a million times.<sup>2</sup>

The advantage to local innovation means the freedom to take risks and central government acknowledge that some schemes will fail. But failure will stay small scale, whilst successes will spread, thus preventing large scale national failures. So this approach is more resilient.

2. **Transparency – the redistribution of knowledge.** The release of information that will allow others to identify social needs and act on them
3. **Social finance** – the redistribution of money- instead of passing through layers of bureaucracy public funds should get straight through to wherever and whoever can use them most effectively. This means contestable contracts, payment by results and it also means communities having the right to save, run and own buildings, when they can do that job best. Including paying public service providers by results encourages value for money and innovation at the same time. The Big Society Bank (due to start funding activity from April 2011) will help finance social enterprises, charities and voluntary groups through intermediaries.

One of the ways to allow the Big Society to happen is the abolition of targets, inspections, directives, and other restrictive bureaucracy. This can be seen through the abolition of the CAA, Regional Spatial Strategies, the Standards Board and the Audit Commission. The clear message again to various public sector bodies that it is their duty to facilitate the decentralisation of power. There is an approach that looks at breaking down the barriers preventing local innovation and decentralisation of power depends on 3 further actions:

1. The Right to Know-when public money is being spent, people should be able to see how much is being spent and on what.
2. The right of challenge- the right to change the way that public resources are deployed where-ever and whenever a better proposal can be found.

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<sup>2</sup> Mohammed Yunus – founder of the Grameen Bank

3. Turning government upside down – focussing the attention downwards and outwards to put resources of the government at the service of communities nationwide. In the department of decentralisation they have established a barrier busting team whose sole purpose will be to help community groups get the backing they need when they encounter bureaucratic obstacles to local objectives.

The success of the Big Society depends on local action and central government is looking for people who have taken ideas led by the community and turned them into reality.

The 4 vanguard areas are:

### **Eden Valley (Cumbria)**

- who have established community plans that are led and determined by the community. They are based on geographical areas in the borough. They also have given the opportunity for the community to run community buildings.

### **Maidenhead and Windsor**

- have opened up their finances to allow members of the public access to any expenditure over £500

**The London Borough of Sutton** have proposals to look at:

- Giving people influence for transport decisions and allowing greater local choice in schemes that suit them
- Training a new generation of community organisers
- Giving communities a bigger say on community planning
- Giving people a greater say in local health provision

**Liverpool** - have been contacted and not replied yet

### **The Coalition's Programme for implementation**

- The Coalition's programme for government includes a number of related ideas, including the creation and expansion of mutuals, co-operatives, charities and social enterprises, and enabling these groups to have much greater involvement in the running of public services.
- Introduce a National Citizen Service. A flagship project will provide a programme for 16 year olds to develop skills needed to be active and responsible citizens, mix with people from different backgrounds, and start getting involved in their communities. The tendering process for

organisations to deliver the pilot will open on 1<sup>st</sup> August. The scale of the pilot will however be subject to the CSR.

- Introduce a range of measures to encourage volunteering and involvement in social action, including launching a national day to celebrate and encourage social action, and make regular community service an element of civil service staff appraisals.
- The office for Civil Society (OCS) (previously Office of the Third Sector) is organizing a series of free events for Local Authority commissioners, procurement and finance officers to raise awareness of the new National Third Sector Commissioning Programme. The events will include the VCF social enterprise sector and include classes on EU procurement law; consultation, equality and diversity; funding and finance; service delivery models; outcome based commissioning; de-commissioning. Four national events have been organised so far with more to be announced. There has been speculation that the Compact will be made a statutory duty.

### **Total Place – place based budgets**

Total Place is the concept of services being built round the customer rather round the silo organisations that deliver them. Total Place not only improves services and reduces overlap it also reduces costs. There are major challenges to overcome, not least the way public services are funded, the role of Whitehall and Government departments in breaking down silos and in particular the sharing of budgets with other public sector partners.

The LGA has called for place based budgets with local control over significant public service spending in areas such as welfare services, policing and public health as the next step in the Total Place agenda.

The Coalition government plan to implement a Sustainable Communities Act so that citizens know how much taxpayer's money is spent in their area and have a greater say over how it is spent and this may well find a role for place based budgets

### **Challenges to place based budgets**

There are 3 main challenges to implementing Place Based Budgets:

- There is a need to recognise that there is significant variation in capability across local government
- Greater emphasis should be put on giving substantive powers to citizens and neighbourhoods, through their active participation and leadership of key areas of service commissioning

- The challenge of how to drive decisions which cut across the boundaries of health, social care, welfare worklessness and community safety establishing a legitimate and credible form of accountable local leadership.

### **Policing in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century; reconnecting police and the people – the role for partnerships**

Additionally, the consultative white paper *'Policing in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century; reconnecting police and the people'* that sets out the vision for policing, sees a role for partnerships working together to tackle joint community determined outcomes, contributing towards the Big Society. It sees crime being tackled by enabling and encouraging people to get involved and mobilizing neighbourhood activists. They envisage using more special constables, using new ideas to unlock the potential of police volunteers, clearly manifestations of the Big Society in action.

They intend to remove unnecessary prescription and bureaucracy in partnership working but leave the duty to work together. CSPs will have the flexibility to decide how best to deliver to their communities.

This consultative paper gives us some implications about how partnerships and LSPs will be seen in the future:

- Working together without unnecessary paperwork, bound by a statutory duty to co-operate
- Achieving community determined outcomes through working with and enabling the community through volunteering.

### **The Way forward for WSP**

At WBC, the fundamental underlying driver of everything we do is our customer and what they want. This is also the driver behind the Big Society, so we are well positioned to act when the Localism Bill is introduced in November.

More about how the WSP is well placed. C E Strategy, Area Forums, Area planning, Core strategy by areas, PB, etc.

It is clear that the future role of LSPs will be as facilitators working in partnership with the community and statutory organisations to bring about decentralisation and the 3 strands of the Big Society, decentralisation, philanthropy and public sector reform. It seems likely that there will be a form of community budgets working around community priorities and on a small scale. The Government is waiting to see what ideas local government come up with and are encouraging us to act before the Localism Bill. They are pointing towards the 4 vanguard authorities as an example of this,

The government are looking for leaders in the Big Society and seeking ideas as to what it may look like. There is an opportunity for the WSP to lead the

way in implementing (In general, I'd be happier with the emphasis of the paper being around 'the WSP is starting to' rather than 'the WSP has an opportunity to') :

**A place based budget with outcomes determined and aided in delivery by the community:**

There is conflict in the place based budgets – how can public bodies be bringing budgets together in a centralised controlling way, while at the same time facilitating devolution of spending power to communities -, as envisaged by the LGA, but the Big Society is renaming them 'Community Budgets' so we can infer that the organisations working in partnership and pooling budgets will be working with the community to spend them, so the approach would be a combination of place based budgets with a Big Society flavour.

There is an opportunity (see above) here for WSP to invest some time and effort working towards a devolved budget and some participatory budgeting with the communities. Could it be possible to bring together several organisations under the outcome of – say - anti social behaviour, pool some of their budget and work with the community to introduce measures to tackle ASB?

**Devolving WBC budgets to the Area Forums to determine small matters such as litter bins and dog fouling**

If it is indeed the responsibility of public bodies to facilitate decentralisation there is potential to further develop the Forum action plans by giving them further devolved monies to decide on items such as litterbins, gully clearance, residents parking. This is an ideal time to consider this as the County Council are currently looking at ways to devolve their decisions making to the districts.

**Running community development training programmes**

**Further investing in Volunteering and enhancing the brokerage role, currently being developed by the Volunteering in Wyre project**

WSP are very well placed with their investment in Volunteering and the importance they have place on volunteering being essential to the delivery of outcomes in Wyre. In this respect, we are already addressing the Big Society in Wyre.

Clearly, more investment will be needed in Volunteering and community empowerment and development, and organisations will need to work together to facilitate this.

**Further developing community led planning through the area Forum action plans and mini area strategies.**

Part of the Big Society agenda is to enable communities to decide on housing and planning issues. This work has been started by WSP and Planning Services through their seminar on community planning and the idea of planning ambassadors. It can be developed further using the help of Planning Aid into developing some of the ambassadors further. One of the priorities of our local communities is to have a much better dialogue with Planning services and the Big Society will be the tool to make this happen, but empowerment will happen too. There is the scope to ensure that 'Community investment funds', secured through S106 of the Town and Country Planning Act, can be allocated and managed more effectively by communities through the Partnership.

The 5 local area forums are developing action plans and commissioning projects with £2,000 from the WSP. Sitting along side these plans are the mini area strategies that are being developed as part of the Core Strategy. So, we are clearly on our way with community based planning but there is further to go.

### **Developing community leaders as commissioners**

The WSP have started to develop a commission based approach to the distribution of funding, but emphasis needs to be put onto the stakeholder stage of the commissioning process, where the community needs to get involved.

One possibility is to expand the commissioning idea to area forums, where they are presently carrying out this function on a small scale for capital projects and developing community leaders as commissioners by providing training courses.

### **Expanding the Community Engagement Strategy into a Community Empowerment Strategy**

There is a Community Engagement Strategy in place at the moment that contains good practice pledges that over 50 organisations are signed up to. It promises a partnership approach to community engagement and a sharing of information and data and there will be a community engagement network underpinning this.

There could be scope to expand the Community Engagement Network into a Community Empowerment network that could share best practice between the VCFS sector and the statutory sector and provide training for communities to enable them to meet the challenge of the Big Society. This could include intergenerational training and link into the providers of the National Citizen Service, which is a programme for young people to teach them civic responsibilities and challenge themselves and is currently out for tender. (I see us having a great deal more to do on the CE strategy, but that doesn't prevent us from developing a Community Empowerment Strategy from it. This, for me, would have a similar approach – common principles that everyone signs up to, a register of activity, and a good practice guide.)

## **Developing the Fleetwood North Neighbourhood Management project by investing more time in working with the community**

The development of the Fleetwood Neighbourhood Management project is a step in the right direction, in that the key agencies are lined up to deliver the priorities of the 2 wards in an action focussed fashion. The Community Liaison group that feeds the Steering Group has been trained in Neighbourhood Engagement and received a qualification in this field.

Future possibilities for development of the project could include engagement of the Community through community awards and ceremony and encouraging them to recruit more community volunteers through a 'cascade' system, which would mean each member of the community would pledge to talk to 6-10 members of the community about topical issues or sending out a message (Lots more we could say about the current NM approach to CE but not sure its politic at this stage)

## **Developing the relationship with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sector through Wyre Together**

Many of the facets of the Big Society agenda require the 3<sup>rd</sup> sector or the private sector to deliver them. Wyre Together is becoming part of the partnership landscape in Wyre and their preparations to deliver the Big Society agenda are underway.

WSP have very strong links with Wyre Together and these can be built upon to establish social enterprises that are capable of carrying out some of the community development and empowerment functions required by the Big Society. This will also need a fresh approach to the Stronger Communities theme group that can be tied into a general review of the LSP.

Statements about Third Sector commissioning, readiness of Third sector and statutory partners in Wyre and therefore, the need for someone to bridge the gap. (I have some doubts about whether Wyre Together can give the impetus to the Third Sector in Wyre (let alone the statutory sector) that will be needed)

## **Developing the Overview and Scrutiny role through Community Engagement**

WBC takes its role as guardian of public money very seriously and in the Big Society there is emphasis on access to the way it is spent on and on what. (clumsy). Overview and Scrutiny are currently setting their work programme for the forthcoming year and consulted with the Area Forums to understand what the priority areas are for the people of Wyre.

It could be that further consideration is given to community involvement in Overview and Scrutiny and public spending and the community given a role as scrutinisers of the budget and introduced as a formal part of the Council processes. Not sure about any of this section.

## **Delivering the Big Society through devolving services from the County Council.**

It would be ultimately desirable to devolve services around pavements, gully clearances, residents parking etc to the local areas, using the Area Forums as a mechanism. However, the democratic element needs to be addressed and this seems to be the additional aspect of the County Council's new Locality groups. It would seem sensible to open up a dialogue with the County Council in the light of the new Localism Bill about a joint approach to ....., especially if we acknowledge that involving and empowering the community is crucial, it seems profligate to be cavalier about the community time devoted to two local mechanisms. It would also be innovative, address the issues around two tier working and take a step in the right direction for Community Budgets and total place.

Role of Parish Councils?

### **How this will happen – What happens next?**

The WSP have already decided that a review of structure, operations and direction is necessary and that it should be undertaken after the Localism Bill is published. They have agreed that preparation work should be undertaken and this discussion paper is part of that preparation. The review should be wide ranging and include the possibility of forming ourselves into a Big Society delivery team or grouping ourselves round community determined outcomes or forming ourselves into a private delivery team as now possible under the new Management powers that enable those who are delivering a service to form a company to deliver it more efficiently and cheaply. Much more thought here.

Reference to locally determined outcomes – based on Sustainable Community Strategy, and measurement against these.