

**CIPFA**

The Chartered Institute of  
Public Finance & Accountancy

CIPFA charities panel paper

**big  
society**

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# what is big society?

- 1.1 Big Society is a Government agenda that seeks to give more power and responsibility to people and communities. Key themes are:
  - Giving communities more powers
  - Encouraging people to take an active role in their communities
  - Transferring powers from central to local government
  - Supporting co-operatives, mutuals, charities and social enterprises in the running of public services
  - Publishing government data
- 1.2 At the heart of the Big Society is the idea of local people and communities taking action for themselves, with government providing a supportive framework to enable this to happen. “The Big Society is what happens whenever people work together for the common good. It is about achieving our collective goals in ways that are more diverse, more local and more personal”<sup>1</sup>.
- 1.3 “The best contribution that central government can make is to devolve power, money and knowledge to those best placed to find the best solutions to local needs: elected local representatives, frontline public service professionals, social enterprises, charities, co-ops, community groups, neighbourhoods and individuals.”<sup>1</sup>
- 1.4 One of the difficulties people have with the ‘Big Society’ idea is that it can be hard to pin down, partly because, although it seeks substantial changes in the way we think about and do things, it is very much dependent on how local communities and organisations on the ground apply new opportunities for local decision making, planning and development. The nature and scale of likely change is linked to many and varied types of local activity rather than one centrally configured blue print for community, individual and public service engagement.
- 1.5 What is clear is that the proposed changes signal a shift away from expecting government to provide all of the answers to a position where local communities, voluntary and community organisations, social enterprises and individuals initiate debate and then negotiate with government regarding how their aspirations can be met.
- 1.6 There are a range of government policies which now draw on the Big Society vision. We look at some of these in the following sections and then finish with a number of existing social enterprise examples.

<sup>1</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government (2010) Decentralisation and the Localism Bill: An essential guide

# office for civil society initiatives

- 2.1 **Community First** - A small grants fund 'to help neighbourhood groups implement their own plans to improve the neighbourhood'.<sup>2</sup>
- 2.2 **Community Organisers** - A training programme to 'build and mobilize local networks and leadership to drive the change that local areas need'. Community organisers will support the creation of neighbourhood groups and help each community coordinate local support for, and involvement in, its plans.
- 2.3 **National Citizens' Service** - A proposed youth programme 'designed to promote a more cohesive and responsible society'. It will bring '16 year olds from different backgrounds together in (short) residential and community based programmes of activity'.
- 2.4 **Support for co-operatives and mutuals** - Including a proposal to develop a network of mentors to advise and assist 'pathfinder' cooperatives and mutuals.
- 2.5 **The Big Society Bank** - This is to be funded from bank accounts that have been dormant for at least 15 years. The purpose being "to grow the social enterprise market and make it easier for social entrepreneurs to access capital".
- 2.6 **Support for capacity building** - This concerns 'improving infrastructure support to frontline organisations', including supporting the work of local voluntary and community development, training and support organisations.
- 2.7 **Public services** - This includes looking at public service reform and the delivery of public services by a range of civil society and private sector providers.
- 2.8 **Red tape task force** - Looking at ways to reduce unnecessary administrative and/or regulatory burdens imposed on charities, co-operatives, social enterprises, voluntary and community organisations.

<sup>2</sup> For more information see: <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/content/big-society-overview>

# \ localism

- 3.1 The localism agenda is built on:
  - Lifting the burden of bureaucracy
  - Empowering communities to do things their way
  - Increasing local control of public finance
  - Diversifying the supply of public services
  - Opening up government to public scrutiny
  - Strengthening accountability to local people
- 3.2 **Reformed planning and employee led social enterprise initiatives** - A Localism Bill will reform the planning system with a view to empowering neighbourhoods, and will also enable public service employees to form independent employee-owned co-operatives. National planning guidance will be simplified and remove housing targets previously imposed via Regional Spatial Strategies. Local Planning Authorities will, instead, prepare their own plans based on local housing need.
- 3.3 **Incentives to accept development** - Local authorities will be encouraged to create local plans that allow development of land for housing and employment by receiving funding from central government. Local communities would undertake exercises in collaborative democracy to decide on whether to support housing and employment development and would receive a proportion of the financial incentives being offered, which can help fund community-led services. New rights and powers for communities include:
- 3.4 **Community right to challenge** - Voluntary and community groups will have the right to express an interest in taking over the running of a local service. The local authority must consider and respond to this challenge. This will make it easier for local groups with good ideas to put them forward and drive improvement in local services.
- 3.5 **Community right to bid** - Local authorities will maintain a list of assets of community value. Communities will have the opportunity to nominate assets for possible inclusion. When listed assets come up for sale or change of ownership, community groups will have time to develop a bid and raise the money to buy the asset on the open market.
- 3.6 **Community right to build** - Communities will be encouraged to establish local initiatives to take land into community ownership on which to develop a Local Housing Trust, which could provide affordable and open market housing as well as workspace and land for community facilities, enterprise and environmental benefit.

# \ health

- 4.1 The Public Health section of the Health White Paper states: 'The new service will harness the efforts of the whole of government, the NHS and the big society to improve the public's health'. In addition the White Paper sees a role for social enterprise models in delivering health services.
- 4.2 **Right to provide services through staff led social enterprise** - The NHS operating framework for 2011/12 indicates that guidance will be produced with a view to creating new opportunities for NHS staff to lead service development and transformation through setting up and leading new social enterprises. We could see, for example, the establishment of nurse led services.
- 4.3 **Involving voluntary and community organisations in developing local commissioning strategies** - The framework asks commissioners to consider how social enterprises, voluntary and community organisations can play a role in service delivery, but also how their expert knowledge can be used to help identify the sorts of services and outcomes that communities want and need. "Through this engagement and interaction, commissioners can begin to realise the ambitions of the Big Society."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Department of Health (2010) The operating framework for the NHS in England 2011/12

# a new approach to commissioning

- 5.1 The coalition government has made a commitment to:  
“... support the creation and expansion of mutuals, co-operatives, charities and social enterprises, and enable these groups to have much greater involvement in the running of public services.”<sup>4</sup>
- 5.2 The Green Paper *Modernising commissioning* was released in December 2010 and asks what needs to be changed in the way commissioning works in order to fulfil this commitment. The paper asks four main questions:
  - In which public service areas could Government create new opportunities for civil society organisations to deliver?
  - How could Government make existing public service markets more accessible to civil society organisations?
  - How could commissioners use assessments of full social, environmental and economic value to inform their commissioning decisions?
  - How could civil society organisations support greater citizen and community involvement in all stages of commissioning?
- 5.3 The results of this Green Paper consultation will feed into the broader work on a Public Service Reform White Paper in early 2011.

## **CIPFA and the National Programme for Third Sector Commissioning**

- 5.4 The Office for Civil Society (OCS) engaged LG Improvement and Development (formerly the IDeA) and the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) to deliver a comprehensive training programme for commissioners and finance staff throughout the public sector.
- 5.5 Level One of the programme is designed to increase awareness and understanding of the third sector, help improve engagement and enable greater access to specialist knowledge that will benefit the delivery of public service. It is aimed at commissioning organisations new to working with civil society organisations.
- 5.6 Level Two of the programme aims to develop commissioners skills and provide a detailed understanding of the technical and practical issues involved in enabling more effective engagement with the community, voluntary, charitable and social enterprise sectors.
- 5.7 The programme has been successfully delivered to hundreds of delegates across England and Wales.

<sup>4</sup> Cabinet Office (2010) *The Coalition: Our Programme for Government*

# examples of social enterprise service delivery

## **Benenden Healthcare**

Is one of the UK's longest serving mutual healthcare societies. The Society has a membership of over 930,000 and is currently open to:

- public sector workers and their families
- employees of organisations whose aims and objectives are compatible with the Society
- members of charities, credit unions and co-operatives

It operates Benenden Hospital and offers a range of health care services <http://www.benenden.org.uk/>

## **Brighter Future Workshop**

Brighter Future Workshop specialise in repair, service and sales of new and used mobility equipment. Young persons (with or without disabilities) will train in the workshop, supervised by specialist staff.

<http://www.bfworkshop.co.uk/>

## **Bron Afon Community Housing**

Community based housing organisation, owned by tenants and residents in Torfaen. It owns and manages homes previously owned by Torfaen County Borough Council.

<http://www.bronafon.org.uk/>

## **Central Surrey Health (CSH)**

Central Surrey Health is a social enterprise co-owned by employees who previously delivered community nursing and therapy services from within the PCT. <http://www.centralsurreyhealth.nhs.uk/index.html>

## **The Co-operative Childcare**

Run by Midcounties Co-operative, which operates six nurseries in Oxford, Swindon, Stroud and Dursley.

<http://www.thecooperativechildcare.coop/live/welcome.asp?id=204>

## **Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL)**

GLL Manages 70 leisure centres within the M25 area in partnership with thirteen London Boroughs.

<http://gll.org/default.asp>

## **Redditch Co-operative Homes**

Supports five neighbourhood co-operatives that are self managed by the people who live in their homes.

<http://www.rch.coop/>

## **Sandwell Community Caring Trust**

Providing a range of social care services including: supported living, residential care, day care, respite care and home care. <http://home.btconnect.com/sandwellcct/trust/index.htm>

## **South Leicestershire Home Care Co-operative**

Offers personal care, cleaning, gardening and travel services. <http://www.slcltd.co.uk/index.html>

## **CIPFA Charities Panel**

[www.cipfa.org.uk/panels/charity/](http://www.cipfa.org.uk/panels/charity/)

## **CIPFA and Big Society**

[www.cipfa.org.uk/big society/](http://www.cipfa.org.uk/big society/)



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