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# **Building the Big Society**

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CENTRE FOR ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION

This report is in draft and represents the views of the LSE CASE presenters. It has not yet been cleared by DCLG.

## **CASE Report**

### **Building the Big Society**

#### **Overview**

How can communities, and in particular the more deprived communities, meet the emerging challenge of building the “Big Society”? This short report brings together a range of evidence about civic engagement and community control. Starting from an overview of some of the emerging Coalition policy around the “Big Society” and localism, it proceeds to consider these current directions in the light of the long history and diverse history of “Big Society” type approaches, then outlines some of the opportunities and challenges communities face in taking up these opportunities. It has a specific focus on the challenges for more disadvantaged communities in engaging with the Big Society.

The evidence considered is mainly drawn from a range of national and international studies which the primary authors have been engaged in, but also covers some underlying background statistics which provide a context within which to place the more specific studies. It takes a wide view, both historically and geographically. Its aim is to provide a practical overview of some of the key issues in achieving community control.

This report comprises syntheses of the short presentations made as part of a cross government meeting convened by DCLG on 10 February 2011, and a list of participants is at the annex. It summarises evidence presented by CASE at LSE, the University of Manchester, and DCLG, in the context of the government’s publicly stated position and own published evidence, and the final section provides a brief unattributed summary of some of the views expressed at that meeting.

## **Introduction**

In the current policy debates, including those around how to compensate for reductions in public spending to address the current deficit, the 'Big Society' is supposed to help create stronger communities that can do more to help themselves without first turning to the state for help. In the 'Big Society', communities know how to organise local events and services, are involved in running local schools, raising funds for local causes, providing local services and generating neighbourhood plans and budgets. An underlying and key question for this agenda is to ask what we know about what mobilises communities to achieve social goals, and what drives volunteering, co-operation and engagement. What can we learn from past experience, and past studies, about drivers of community control and cooperation?

This is not a new question, nor a question which is restricted to the UK context, although current UK challenges present new opportunities. These come from the overarching localist and decentralising government policy agenda covering the work of many of the key policy areas – health, education, local government, regeneration, crime, and others. Self-help and community control have become, for the Coalition, both fiscal necessities and central social policy objectives, in equal measure.

This paper is therefore divided into two main sections. Following a brief overview of current policy objectives, the first section looks at what we have called "the long roots of the Big Society". This considers examples from other countries of similar successful initiatives as well as evidence from the Tenant Management Organisation movement – probably the best UK example of communities taking control of their own neighbourhoods. The second part focuses on capacity and potential to build the big society. This first examines some of the underlying data about the current extent and nature of community engagement in England, then goes on to consider some research projects aimed at stimulating engagement through "nudges" or "tickles". The final paper explores in more detail the interaction between community empowerment and deprivation, and what might be done to address issues raised.

## **Background: Current UK Government Policy Context**

1. The overarching framework of the “Big Society” is set out by Cabinet Office<sup>1</sup> as follows:

*“There are three key parts to the Big Society agenda*

- **Community empowerment:** *giving local councils and neighbourhoods more power to take decisions and shape their area. Our planning reforms led by DCLG will replace the old top-down planning system with real power for neighbourhoods to decide the future of their area.*
- **Opening up public services:** *our public service reforms will enable charities, social enterprises, private companies and employee-owned co-operatives to compete to offer people high quality services. The welfare to work programme, led by the Department for Work and Pensions will enable a wide range of organisations to help get Britain off welfare and into work.*
- **Social action:** *encouraging and enabling people to play a more active part in society. National Citizen Service, Community Organisers and Community First will encourage people to get involved in their communities”.*

2. A more radical formulation of the overall enterprise, focusing on the transfer of power, is set out by DCLG<sup>2</sup>:

*“Government is overseeing a fundamental shift of power away from Westminster to councils, communities and homes across the nation. A radical localist vision is turning government on its head by giving power to the people rather than hoarding authority within government.*

*Over time Britain has become increasingly centralised. Central Government has exerted a high degree of control over local action and has increasingly moved into the space that others should own. The time has come to disperse power more widely in Britain today; to recognise that we only make progress if we help people to come together to make life better.*

*The Government is committed to a radical shift of power from Westminster to local people. Localised decision-making will become a normal part of everyday life, giving people more say, choice and ownership of their local facilities and services. By increasing town hall transparency, people will know what's going on, who's spending their money and on what. People want better for less in their services and we will free up councils to make that happen by giving them greater flexibility for local spending decisions and lifting the bureaucratic burden of targets and inspection. This will free councils and professionals to prioritise resources, redesign services and collaborate with others, ensuring that the vital services that their areas value can be delivered.*

*People will have a greater reason to vote for councils and mayors. Individuals, families, local communities and particularly neighbourhoods, the*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/content/big-society-overview>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/decentralisation/>

*building blocks of localism, will be re-energised and empowered, and innovation and ideas will flow from local people and enterprises”.*

3. This vision is further articulated in DCLG’s “Decentralisation and the Localism Bill: an essential guide”<sup>3</sup>. Nick Clegg’s introduction states:

*“Radical decentralisation means stripping away much of the top-down bureaucracy that previous governments have put in the way of frontline public services and civil society. It means giving local people the powers and funding to deliver what they want for their communities – with a particular determination to help those who need it most. And it means doing what previous governments have not dared: reforming the excessively centralised tax system which stifles local autonomy and innovation.*

*The power shift we want will not happen overnight. We will face opposition from those with a vested interest in the status quo. But we know that dispersing power is the way to improve our public services and get the better schools and safer hospitals we want. Democratic engagement, choice, transparency and diversity will not just make the country more liberal, fairer and more decentralised: they will also help develop the world-class public services people want”.*

4. Six key elements of action to deliver localism are then set out in the document, many of which are being taken forward by the provisions of the Localism Bill, as follows:

<b>Action 1: Lift the burden of bureaucracy</b>	<b>The first thing that government should do is to stop stopping people from building the Big Society</b>
<b>Action 2: Empower communities to do things their way</b>	<b>Getting out of the way is not enough, government must get behind the right of every community to take action</b>
<b>Action 3: Increase local control of public finance</b>	<b>Government must will the means, as well as the ends, of community power</b>
<b>Action 4: Diversify the supply of public services</b>	<b>Local control over local spending requires a choice of public service providers</b>
<b>Action 5: Open up government to public scrutiny</b>	<b>Public service providers should be subject to transparency not bureaucracy</b>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/1793908.pdf>

**Action 6: Strengthen accountability to local people**

**Public services shouldn't just be open to scrutiny, but also subject to the individual and collective choices of active citizens**

5. It will be helpful to unpack these a bit more, drawing on this document:

**Lift the burden of bureaucracy**

This involves stripping away the burdens and barriers which hold back local services and institutions, including removing unnecessary legislation, targets and central prescription.

**Empower communities to do things their way**

This suggests new powers and encouragement which remove obstacles to community action, and create rights to take action and unlock the potential of communities (again, some contained within the Localism Bill). These are intended to create the conditions where civic participation becomes the norm, and might include a range of local actions starting with the less formal activity of looking after neighbours or volunteering for a local service through the more formal activities of being a school governor, magistrate, or councillor, through to the more intense activities of running a Free School or within the NHS exercising the Right to Request, which gives NHS staff the right to propose and form social enterprises to run the services they deliver.

**Increase local control of public finances**

This is a crucial element of local control, in that it proposes financial devolution to local communities, rather than simply consultation around a budget held at local authority level. It involves action to take away unnecessary Whitehall controls, provide freedoms for local leaders to pool and align budgets, and provide the opportunity for individuals to control and influence budgets through personalised budgeting. It also includes provisions to continue and expand transfers of community capital assets.

**Diversify the supply of public services**

A central element of the proposals is to open up opportunities for new suppliers to provide public services, and to introduce greater competition in public services to improve quality, stimulate innovation, widen choice and drive-up efficiency. Further details will be set out in the Public Services White Paper, which will provide proposed solutions to some of the trickier procurement and service transfer questions around this. A new “community right to challenge” is also within the Localism Bill.

**Open up government to public scrutiny**

This “transparency” goal was one of the first to be put in place, including the publication of greater information about local authority spend, and aims to ensure that local financial information is widely accessible and comparable, allowing communities to shape services

and challenge service providers to do better. The aim is “to focus on outcome, not process, and to release such knowledge into the public domain as raw data – so that anyone can analyse and visualise the information, spot trends and make connections that would otherwise go unseen”.

### **Strengthen accountability to local people**

Elected mayors, elected crime commissioners and local petitions are elements of this approach, which is also based on people “voting with their feet” in terms of local choice of service providers, and personalised budgets. There is also an element of “direct participation” whereby the reforms outlined in the guide – including community budgets and community ownership of local assets – are designed to bring decision-making power to where people are already involved in their communities. This section concludes that “ultimately, the most accessible form of government is self-government”

6. This paper does not attempt to provide a critique of the appropriateness of these policy statements as approaches to building community control and the Big Society, nor of their coherence or comprehensiveness. It does, however, seek to outline some of the evidence and history of community engagement in the light of the statements, and in particular uses the six principles of action above as key areas of focus.

## **Part One: The long roots of the Big Society**

### **PREAMBLE - Anne Power, LSE**

1. The framework of six principles to guide our assessment of progress in decentralisation and local initiative-taking harks back to past debates about community services and community involvement. The common aims of decentralisation have always been to create less bureaucracy, increase local empowerment, provide greater transparency, stimulate stronger accountability, and enable local dedicated budgets and more diverse service provision<sup>4</sup>. Current political rhetoric about 'Big Society' and community organising evokes past experiences of community-based action and local projects to improve conditions.
2. The framework is useful for assessing community initiatives that are encouraged and part-funded by the public sector. Examples from the UK such as tenant management organisations and neighbourhood management, and from Europe such as co-operatives, social lettings agencies, social care-taking volunteers and tenants' democracy, are helpful to learn how best to approach the twin challenges of localism and resource constraints in low income communities.
3. The publicly funded, community-level initiatives explored in this paper had a common aim to improve neighbourhood conditions for residents - they all rely on 'community buy-in'. This means that citizen involvement and action is fundamental to making neighbourhood organisations work - and the more disadvantaged the community or the target group, the more important it is that residents be involved. Otherwise damage at best or conflict at worst may result. Imposed solutions can provoke resident opposition, even where the intentions are laudable.<sup>5</sup> This problem arises in many large-scale regeneration schemes which residents can obstruct. Gentrification and demolition decisions immediately spring to mind as types of intervention that can provoke negative reactions, but so do decisions on closing youth clubs or play facilities.

### **What history teaches us**

4. For the last 200 years, England has been a strongly urban society and until a generation ago, a major industrial power. These realities have shaped the way we are governed today, under the powerful drive of business initiative, moral concerns, and the over-riding need for a new order in chaotic urban conditions. Modern urban communities emerged from nineteenth century squalor through the creation of over-arching structures of government such as law enforcement, standards of probity,

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<sup>4</sup> To which we could add the eight aims of localism, which include: democratic control; formal volunteering; local involvement in services; community self-help; fundraising; good neighbours and mutual aid, and pro-social behaviour.

<sup>5</sup> Power, A and Tunstall, R. (1997) Dangerous Disorder York, Joseph Rowntree Foundation

local infrastructure - water, power, and sanitation access<sup>6</sup>. As we became wealthier, businesses responded to their labour-force problems by supporting core universal services - education, public health, housing, sanitation, a safety net for incomes, and others. In order to deliver the radical advances in the ordering of society that were widely supported at many levels of society, a complex system of governance emerged. Winning majority support was a necessary condition of social stability in a period of great social changes. Order needed to be upheld in difficult times and under difficult conditions. Policing, environmental controls, legal enforcement against public nuisance all became embedded in the new and complex structures of government. The long-run social problems thrown up by explosive urban industrial growth have broadly been mitigated and brokered through these channels.<sup>7</sup> They remain central to our urban structures today

### **Why government?**

5. It is a sign of economic and social progress that modern, democratic governments play an overarching role in society by providing a public infrastructure that citizens can rely on if they are to take positive action to advance community, neighbourhood and national interests. We have identified six conditions that are most central to local action, that are supported by society as a whole, in order to tackle local problems that have wider repercussions and costs:
  - enabling government
  - local delivery structures and organisations
  - local awareness and know-how
  - dedicated resources
  - codes of conduct and ground rules
  - commitment to citizen involvement as part of a healthy society
6. With these supports, many local but widely dispersed problems can be solved or at least limited in their impacts. Such problems include:
  - neighbourhood environmental damage;
  - resource wastage;
  - youth disorder;
  - elderly isolation;
  - basic area health inequalities.
7. Evidence to support the argument that community based action can solve many local problems can be found across Europe. Research into troubled European estates, into neighbourhood renewal, and into community responses to external support shows this.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Briggs, A. (1965) Victorian Cities New York: Harper & Row

<sup>7</sup> Hunt, T. (2004) Building Jerusalem: The rise and fall of the Victorian city, London: Weidenfield and Nicholson

<sup>8</sup> Power, A. (1997). Estates on the Edge: the social consequences of mass housing in Northern Europe. New York, St. Martin's Press; Power, A. (2007). City Survivors: Bringing up Children in Disadvantaged Neighbourhoods, Bristol: Policy Press; Hills, J., Sefton, T. and Stewart, K. (eds) (2009). Towards a More Equal Society? Poverty, Inequality and Policy since 1997., Bristol: Policy Press

## Conditions of success<sup>9</sup>

8. People in disadvantaged areas and circumstances will only want to join in and take action, if the immediate need is great enough and the chances of success high enough. This often requires the direct support of those advocating such involvement, whether voluntary groups or official bodies. Local involvement must offer more benefits to participants than costs, and the costs in any case must be relatively low, given the immediate pressures on low income areas and households. Visible success helps to convince a wide body of citizens that something tangible will result from their efforts. One of the biggest motivators is the impact of community action. It generates pride and confidence as well as directly solving problems.
9. Local people need influence and access to those making higher level decisions, otherwise the efforts of individuals and groups will founder. For we live in a complex and mobile society, with an urban infrastructure that means that no one single group or community can prevail over their local conditions without wider support.<sup>10</sup> But they need government to adopt an 'enabling' approach rather than imposed solutions.
10. Control over the allocation of real resources is a major motivator, as the spectacle of waste, or of high rewards for better placed and better connected people, drives people to want a fairer share and more control. Riots are often provoked by people feeling shut out of decisions, control and the use of resources. In contrast, local budgets and local decision-making over priorities for action motivates residents to get involved, while giving people real responsibility. The paper by Liz Richardson and her book 'DIY Community Action' elaborate on these arguments<sup>11</sup>.

## World-wide phenomenon of community action

11. We have argued that a government framework to support community action is essential in highly developed urban economies, and also that certain conditions are necessary for success in European societies. However, there are also convincing examples from around the world, in more rurally based, less developed, less democratic and even authoritarian and patriarchal societies, of community action achieving similar levels of progress.<sup>12</sup> Common patterns and themes emerge from these very diverse experiences that underline the power and pervasiveness of self-help, the added value of bottom-up citizen action, and the need for wider support, even in fragile and under-developed

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<sup>9</sup> There is more discussion about the broader issues of community self-help in low income neighbourhoods, and the project, Richardson, L, 2008: *DIY Community Action: neighbourhood problems and community self-help*; Policy Press London

<sup>10</sup> Power, A. and J. Houghton (2007). *Jigsaw Cities: Big places, small spaces*. Bristol, The Policy Press.

<sup>11</sup> Richardson, L. (2008) *DIY Community Action*. Bristol: Policy press

<sup>12</sup> Yunus, M. (1999) *Banker to the Poor* United States, Public Affairs; Moser, C. (2009) *Ordinary families, extraordinary lives* Washington, The Brookings Institute; Milton, D. and Satterthwaite, D. 2004;

situations. Governments invariably play an important role, most often at the local level.

12. We can adapt home grown models, based on the rich learning from elsewhere, and we can also apply lessons from elsewhere to some new problems we face such as greater inequality, youth deskilling, housing affordability and access, expanding care needs etc. Innovations that are home grown, and that are reinforced by wider lessons from abroad, will catch on if they show results; they expand and flourish if they bring the promised local and wider gains.

## INTERNATIONAL EXAMPLES OF DECENTRALISATION – Anne Power, LSE

13. Work over the past thirty years under various governments and in different countries has thrown up many fascinating illustrations of our core argument that localised services work if coupled with community action and involvement and an overarching, supportive framework. The four working examples illustrated here all derive from housing conditions, housing need and housing management<sup>13</sup> and are:

- England's neighbourhood management, as piloted and then rolled out through the neighbourhood renewal programme (2000-2006);
- Denmark's tenants' democracy, as practiced with legal backing through the Scandinavian cooperative system (in place since 1995);
- Italy's social caretaking experiments, initiated in entrepreneurial cities to compensate for significant reductions in state support for local bureaucracies (in Torino and Trieste since 2008);
- Belgium's social-private lettings agencies, initiated by low-income co-operatives within the private rented sector in several Belgian cities and backed by the Belgian government (Agencies Immobilières Sociales, paper by Albert Martins, 2010).

14. Each example is briefly described below under common headings to simplify comparisons.

### **Box 1: Neighbourhood Management under the English Neighbourhood Renewal Programme**

- **The basics** – a local manager is based in a local office responsible for the maintenance of area conditions and coordination of local services such as street cleaning, security, policing, schools, shops, open spaces,

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1. <sup>13</sup> The examples are drawn from five main areas of research:

- Difficult to let estates in the UK (Power, A. (1987) Property before people: the management of twentieth-century council housing. London, Allen & Unwin.)
- European social housing policy (Power, A. (1993) Hovel to High Rise. New York, Routledge; Power, A. (1997). Estates on the Edge: the social consequences of mass housing in Northern Europe. New York, St. Martin's Press.)
- Weak Market Cities (Power, A. and J. Houghton (2007). Jigsaw Cities: Big places, small spaces. Bristol, The Policy Press; Power, A. et al. (2010). Phoenix Cities: the fall and rise of great industrial cities. Bristol, Policy Press; Power, A Et al. (2008) Tale of 7 Cities. York, Joseph Rowntree Foundation)
- Community- level research into families in difficult areas (Power, A. (2007). City Survivors: Bringing up Children in Disadvantaged Neighbourhoods, Bristol: Policy Press; Power, A. and K. Mumford (2003). East Enders : family and community in east London. Bristol, The Policy Press; Power, A (2011) Family Futures Bristol, policy Press)
- Tenant co-operatives, tenant management, and community-based housing organisations (Power, A. and J. Houghton (2007). Jigsaw Cities: Big places, small spaces. Bristol, The Policy Press; Power, A. (2004) Neighbourhood management and the future of urban areas, CASEPaper 77, London, LSE)

covering around 2000-5000 homes and spaces. The neighbourhood manager is also responsible for consultation and collaboration with residents including young people. Local budgetary control is essential for local problem solving to work; and a dedicated funding stream from public and private sources is essential for local decision-making, a sense of control, community buy-in and ground-level progress.

- **Examples:**
  - Broadwater Farm housing estate, Haringey, London – began in 1983 and continued to date;
  - Town Centre Management companies;
  - Tenant Management Organisations.
- **Origins**
  - Poor estate and area conditions;
  - Need for hands-on local coordination of locally delivered services;
  - Urgency of better community relations
- **Community Impacts**
  - Reduced crime / increased security
  - More confidence in the area
  - More representation and involvement
  - More activities for youth and children
  - More community-based activity
- **Proven Value – costs and benefits**
  - Repair and cleaning performance improves;
  - Street supervision and security become higher priorities;
  - Local office provides accessible conduit for local problem-solving and local priorities;
  - Resident satisfaction rises;
  - Relatively low cost - £50 per household per annum;
  - Lower insurance costs for households shops and other activities;
  - Lower vandalism and youth behaviour costs
  - Lower maintenance and repair costs
- **Government underpinning**
  - Core funding for core environmental maintenance; safety and community well-being, now incorporated into a single pot for all local government spending.<sup>14</sup>

## **Box 2: Tenants' democracy, Denmark**

- **The basics:**
  - Elected tenant board on every estate of 50+ homes
  - Elected tenant **majority** representing each estate on all Danish housing company boards
  - Tenant training in essential housing, community, financial and legal obligations

<sup>14</sup> Power, A. (2004) Neighbourhood management and the future of urban areas, CASEPaper 77, London, LSE; Urban Task Force (1999) Towards an urban renaissance: final report of the Urban Task Force, London, Stationery Office.

- Requirement to place estate staff on all social housing estates of 50 or more units
- Legally underpinned and funded through social housing framework
- **Examples:**
  - All social housing companies in Denmark with variants in all Scandinavian countries
- **Origins:**
  - Viking co-operative traditions
  - Dislike of over-powerful state
  - Practice of delivering public services through co-operatives
  - Long tradition of voluntary action and citizen engagement
- **Proven Value – costs and benefits**
  - Lasting model, citizen-based housing organisations evolved in late nineteenth century;
  - Almost universally popular with tenants and landlords;
  - Shared responsibility between tenants, landlords and social agencies;
  - Sustained high standards of housing management;
  - Viability of large estates underpinned;
  - Active community organisations stimulated and encouraged;
  - Pro-social attitudes fostered and rewarded;
  - Resulting in relatively low crime and anti-social behaviour;
  - Many locally supported and organised activities for children and young people;
  - Relatively low cost
    - 2% rent budget is dedicated to tenant initiated activities on each estate
    - 12% of rent budget is reserved for caretaking and cleaning on each estate
    - Other dedicated local budget items include repairs and planned maintenance, open space maintenance and local management, which underpin delivery of tenant democracy linked to high quality estate management
    - All activities funded from ring fenced rent account
- **Community Impacts**
  - Frequent, easy communication between local staff and tenants;
  - Constant skill development and enhanced sense of responsibility among tenants;
  - Lots of social activity, social capital, community spaces
  - High standards of management
  - Attractive, well maintained estate environments
- **Government underpinning**
  - Regulated social housing rents
  - Defined role for tenants
  - Subsidies for social activities<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Power, A. (1993) *Hovel to High Rise*. New York: Routledge; Power, A. (1997). *Estates on the Edge: the social consequences of mass housing in Northern Europe*. New York, St. Martin's Press; Wilkinson, R. and Pickett, K. (2009) *The Spirit Level: Why more equal societies almost always do better* London: Allen Lane; Power, A. (1999) *High-rise Estates in Europe: Is rescue possible?* Journal of European Social Policy Vol. 9 (2) p. 139-163;

Note: the first principle, lifting the burden of bureaucracy, does not strictly apply as Denmark and other Scandinavian countries strongly endorse government regulation of almost all forms of collective activity. Many outsiders and critics argue that the costs of this are high and the tax rate is high. However, the benefits are also high and the competitiveness of Scandinavian countries in exports, high tech design, environmental technologies, economic and social innovation is not in question. On the other hand, Danish and Swedish governments encourage and support independent and arm's length structures for housing, schools and many other social enterprises, often in the form of co-operatives.

### **Box 3: Social Caretaking in Italy**

- **The Basics**

- Young people, usually students are recruited as volunteers to help provide support to vulnerable tenants, giving 10hrs a week to help elderly or fragile residents living in blocks of old, run down 'IACP' flats in exchange for cheap rent
- They visit and shop for the elderly
- They check vulnerable tenants are ok, help people to the doctor's etc
- They organise social activity in the block
- They report problems to social services and to the housing companies

- **Examples**

- Torino, San Salvario, Trieste

- **Origins**

- Strong tradition of regional, and city-based initiatives
- Civic and co-operative traditions
- Strong value placed on social capital
- Very limited social housing (maybe 5% in Torino, much less in most places)
- Fear of marginalisation of vulnerable groups
- Weak state provision
- Role of Bank Foundations as funders of charitable activity

- **Proven value – costs and benefits**

- Big cost reductions in health and social care
- Increase in social activity and satisfaction with accommodation
- Minimal organisation required
- Much better supervision of conditions and quick reporting
- Many willing volunteers, but careful selection is essential
- Very useful to students to get cheap rent
- Helps social landlord maintain conditions and meet social obligations
- Costs around £180 per month per block of flats

- **Community impacts**

- Gives students greater sense of responsibility
- Elderly feel more secure
- More social contact between young and old and between

- neighbours
    - Develops creative instincts in young people
    - Solves a big social problem cheaply
  - **Government underpinning**
    - Housing subsidies to IACP
    - Legal requirement on banks to dedicate some profits to a Foundation to support community benefits
- Note: Italy has high levels of owner occupation including co-operatives, private renting, and tied accommodation. Only 25 of housing is provided through social landlords which are independent housing companies subsidised by the State called IACP
- This project fulfils all six principles and all eight goals, although it operates on a very small scale and would be hard to spread more widely without more widespread public endorsement

- Box 4: Co-operative Social Lettings Agencies, Belgium**
- **The basics**
    - Low income private tenants desperate for better conditions, including many recent immigrants, organise lettings co-operatives to secure reasonable rents and repairs from private landlords, who let to members under these conditions in exchange for negotiated agreements through the co-operative over tenancy conditions
    - Intermediary co-operative organisations make agreements with owners of empty property to let the property to members at an affordable rent on a 10-year lease in exchange for carrying out basic repairs, offering a low but secure return on the asset in the form of regular rent income, with a guarantee of careful management of property
  - **Examples**
    - Bruxelles, Ghent, Antwerp Agences Sociales Immobilières
  - **Origins**
    - Market pressures on housing, caused by arrival of the European Commission, the World Trade Centre etc. in Bruxelles
    - High immigration from North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa
    - Very little social housing (less than 1%)
    - Co-operative tenant management organisations based on Islington TMOs but in the private sector
    - Lots of unused and under-used property in inner Bruxelles
    - Recognised role of intermediary bodies in organising private tenants and brokering agreements with landlords
  - **Proven Value – costs and benefits**
    - Low cost, affordable rents for low income tenants, subsidised by government
    - The asset remains with the owner without maintenance costs as the co-operative carries these
    - Owners secure a regular return on their previously unused asset
    - Tenants secure affordable rents, better conditions, and security for up to 10 years
    - Properties are restored to use from a dilapidated condition (owners

- pay for basic initial repairs)
- Co-operative lettings help meet a big demand for affordable rents particularly from immigrant groups
- Costs are the government rent subsidy, but no capital cost; the organisational costs of the co-operative are met from rents
- The management and repairs are deducted from the rent before the balance is paid to owner
- **Community impacts**
  - 500 co-operative social lettings agency lets in Bruxelles
  - Tenants and owners report high levels of satisfaction with this mutually beneficial model
  - New bridges are built between the relatively rich and poor, with more positive tenant-landlord relations
  - Rescue of otherwise empty property and its restoration to beneficial use creates an affordable supply of rented housing
- **Government underpinning**
  - Official recognition of Agences Immobilières Sociales
  - Rent subsidy for low income households through the agencies

### Common characteristics of community-based services

15. These four types of decentralised and locally based initiatives share some common features that bring tangible benefits to residents and providers and government while reducing costs:

- They target **disadvantaged communities** where need is greatest and therefore the motivation to do things differently is high;
- They work well because of their local scale but can be applied much more widely while continuing to operate **at a local scale** in many different areas;
- They are all **relatively low cost**, offering a high return as well as many social benefits;
- They all require a **wider supporting framework** - even in the Italian and Belgian cases where governments are weak and independent organisations more crucial;
- They require **steady, low-level resources** over time, rather than short bursts of special programme funding;
- They reward **active residents and volunteers**, mainly through non-monetary social recognition and satisfaction
- They offer high value to **public, private and community interests**, and they generate no known disbenefits, since the resources they use

would need to be used for those purposes anyway, but to much lower effect<sup>16</sup>

### **Evidence of success?**

16. Areas with localised, direct services, in variable forms, show many different measurable signs of progress in basic indicators, such as better staff performance, lower direct and indirect costs, higher satisfaction among residents and staff, lower turnover of residents, less trouble and damage. The models described above are proving durable and popular, not only with needy residents in needy areas but also with politicians and public administrators. Many of them are adopted in less distressed, more average areas, particularly where there is clear government backing, as in tenant democracy in Denmark. There is rapid take-up of these ideas whenever the government is willing to provide essential backing in an enabling way.
17. Strong social arguments exist in favour of local management of parks and street maintenance, since a short chain of command is essential for effective action and problem solving. This simpler process leads to a measurable reduction in social and management costs which reinforces the value of such initiatives.
18. The targeted community based organisations and approaches we examined were able to identify visible results on ground. This evidence supports a local approach, even though monitoring information is often not collated systematically. The research which this paper draws on can be checked for more detailed documentation of the way the initiatives work and how they impact.

### **Conclusions**

19. The lessons we draw about community-based services from international experience and from long-run experiments in this country can be summarised as follows:
  - Community based approaches to social problems have a strong and lasting track record;
  - Cooperative forms of action are deeply embedded in human society, and draw on long-run traditions, and inherent human characteristics;
  - People instinctively want to solve problems;
  - Social control and innovation carry high social rewards and people are altruistic enough to work for this within their own communities;<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Hills, J., Sefton, T. and Stewart, K. (eds) (2009). Towards a More Equal Society? Poverty, Inequality and Policy since 1997., Bristol: Policy Press;

<sup>17</sup>Riddley, M. (1997) The Origins of Virtue London, Penguin Books.

- Core ideas about the organisation and delivery of local services are transferable, while the detail must evolve locally to fit local cultural and political patterns;
  - ‘Outside’ solutions need to be adapted and to match local needs, as the Belgian ‘Agences Immobilières’ drawing on Islington tenant co-operatives demonstrate.<sup>18</sup>
20. In relation to the ‘Big Society’ agenda, this evidence suggests it needs a different kind of enabling government, widespread public support and significant community learning, since:
- In the cases we have explored, a public framework, oversight, regulation, and resources have proved central to community confidence and community buy-in. Local involvement relies on a basic level of publicly funded services in highly developed and complex cities in order to ensure adequate support and enforcement for basic conditions.
  - Without a locally based and active presence it is impossible to ‘tune in’ to local priorities, giving ‘voice’ to less skilled, less articulate, less organised communities.
  - Above all, young people need to have a voice in order to integrate them into secure and stable community.
  - The same applies to ethnic minority communities, a most urgent priority. This is hard to achieve in low income communities without a direct local structure to open doors and organise action to address problems. The same experience applies across the UK and Europe.<sup>19</sup>
21. Without government support, either direct or indirect, none of the examples we have discussed would work. Even the Italian example works because of legal enforcement on Bank Foundations and only operates in publicly sponsored social housing organisations, while in Belgium, government rent supplements guarantee a modest return to private landlords, and an affordable rent for low income tenants. More expensive government programmes cannot be widely replicated, whereas the low-level, mainstream support needed for these programmes is more affordable, partly because it saves on other costs.
22. Finally, localised approaches to community problems have universal relevance, even though they will take different forms in different areas and countries. They are inspiring because they offer win/win solutions; better services at lower costs; savings and benefits; community gains; and some equalisation of conditions.<sup>20</sup> Our study of neighbourhood initiatives and evaluations of government-backed local programmes such as these shows that local initiatives along the lines of neighbourhood management,

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<sup>18</sup> Axelrod, R. (1984) The Evolution of Cooperation, USA, Robert Axelrod; Birchall, J. (1994) Coop: The people’s business, Manchester, Manchester University Press.

<sup>19</sup> Power, A et al. (2008) Tale of 7 Cities York, Joseph Rowntree Foundation;

<sup>20</sup> (Hills, J., Sefton, T. and Stewart, K. (eds) (2009). Towards a More Equal Society? Poverty, Inequality and Policy since 1997., Bristol: Policy Press; Power, A. (2001) Family Futures. Bristol, Policy press.

tenants' democracy and social care-taking help to resolve local problems and positively close the gap in conditions.

## LEARNING FROM TENANT MANAGEMENT ORGANISATIONS<sup>21</sup> - Rebecca Tunstall, LSE

### Introduction

1. Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs) build on a long history of cooperative housing development and management in the UK and elsewhere. They involve a group of social housing residents from a particular neighbourhood, estate or block taking on responsibilities and budgets for managing social housing from their landlords, under a management agreement.<sup>22</sup> Typical TMO powers and responsibilities include repairs reporting, monitoring; arrears recovery; allocations admin; some allocations policy; staff employment; budget management; and contract negotiation<sup>23</sup>.
2. In 2010, there were 210 TMOs in England<sup>24</sup>. This was little changed from the 201 recorded eight years previously<sup>25</sup>. TMOs operate in over 60 local authority areas in England, concentrated in London and the North West; manage on average under 400 homes; and have about 80,000 homes in management across England - 3% of the total local authority stock, about 2% of all social housing stock and about 1% of all homes in England.
3. Depending on size, responsibilities and volunteer capacity, TMOs may have staff, may employ businesses or staff under contract to provide certain services, or work entirely via volunteer residents. In most cases the handful of most active board members worked 1-2 days a week, unpaid. This was a substantial commitment and made it hard to combine in involvement with paid work.
4. Depending on the size of the TMO board and the number of homes managed by the TMO, the number of board members totalled 1%-18% of all residents<sup>26</sup>. Thus the great majority of residents have less direct involvement in the TMO, and one of the tasks of TMO resident board members is to stay in touch with other residents.

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<sup>21</sup> This section draws on three major studies of TMOs and recent consultation with the National Federation of TMOs, cited in the footnotes and at the end of this section.

<sup>22</sup> Legislation, first in 1975, and later in 1986 and 1993, required local authorities in England to enable their tenants to set up TMOs, and set out the processes through which this should occur. There has been further guidance to adapt procedures, most recently following the creation of the Tenant Services Authority in 2008.

<sup>23</sup> Further background details on TMOs can be found at Tunstall, R (2000) *The potential of participation in social policy and administration: The case of Tenant Management Organisations in English council housing*. PhD thesis. Department of Social Policy, LSE. (Available in full from <http://lse.academia.edu/RebeccaTunstall/Papers>)

<sup>24</sup> Cairncross et al. (2002) *Tenants managing: an evaluation of tenant management organisations in England*, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: London.

<sup>25</sup> An estimated 210 according to the National federation of TMOs (NFTMOs data 2010).

<sup>26</sup> Tunstall (2000)

## TMOs and Big Society principles

5. TMOs provide real examples of the following principles in action:
  - *Empower people to take action*: TMO legislation empowers council tenants and leaseholders to set up TMOs; funding is available to empower them to do this<sup>27</sup>; TMOs take action by planning and monitoring housing management services, and in some cases literally providing services themselves.
  - *Let local people control public spending*: the TMO board controls the budget it has negotiated to provide services under the management agreement. Most TMOs make some changes to how budgets are used. However, the landlord retains control over substantial capital and other spending for management responsibilities it retains, and retains ownership of homes.
  - *Diversify the supply of services*: The TMO board itself represents a diversification of provision. If this is permitted under the management agreement, residents may replace staff, renegotiate contracts for service provision by others, or provide services themselves. Many have made small changes, for example in renegotiating contracts.
  - *Strengthen democratic accountability*: The TMO board becomes accountable at very local level for planning and delivering the services it provides under the management agreement, and is subject to scrutiny through informal contact, AGMs, local authority monitoring and elections. The landlord retains responsibility for some policies and services and the local authority councillors remain in place. The TMO board must manage relations with both the local authority and TMO residents.

## The impact of TMOs

6. Evidence<sup>28</sup> suggests TMOs were not expensive to set up, offered a generally good quality service, and in some cases a much improved or innovative service, usually in more deprived areas and often in circumstances where local authorities had found housing 'difficult to manage'. For example, the most recent study(Cairncross) concluded:

*TMOs are providing an effective service... In most cases, they are doing better than their host local authorities and compare favorably with the top 25% of local authorities"*
7. Many have had an impact beyond housing management, for example taking over responsibility for community development, and development of individuals, as well as influencing wider local authority attitudes to tenant participation or by developing ideas for new services. They can have the potential to act as potential supporters of other community groups and

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<sup>27</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/news/newsroom/1840494>

<sup>28</sup>In the 1990s and 2000s, there have been three major pieces of research on TMOs –referenced at the end of this section or in footnotes - which have assessed their growth and evaluated their impact up to 2002: Price Waterhouse 1995; Tunstall 2000; Cairncross et al. 2002; since 2002 the main complementary studies are Millward 2005 and McCabe et al. 2007

form part of mature local 'ecosystems' of community groups. However it is possible that the relative advantage TMOs can offer became less marked as housing management performance improved more generally over the past ten years.

8. TMOs which had the most impact were those developed from pre-existing residents groups, where residents took the initiative, and where residents were strongly motivated, for example by conflict with the local authority or a plan to transform the area. TMOs which reported a good experience with their TMO development agents; and support from the local authority also had more impact, as did those who had taken on more responsibilities under the management agreement, were older, managed fewer homes, or were in a region or local authority with lots of TMOs.
9. Unlike some other past and possible future examples of third sector and 'Big Society' activities, TMOs are concentrated in deprived areas, and they are run by and for residents of these areas. There is also no evidence that they have taken resources from other local areas.
10. Not all TMOs have survived. Although there is no national survival data, of 16 case study TMOs researched in 1998, five or nearly a third had closed by 2011, thirteen years later. All five were in areas affected by stock transfer, and either closed during transfer plans or after transfer took place. This suggests there can be a conflict between Big Society and other policies. The remaining eleven of the sixteen were still going in 2011; and their average age was now 20 years.

### **Conclusion: what helps and hinders TMO development and sustainability?**

11. The evidence suggests that amongst the key features involved are:
  - **A statutory framework:** from 1975m including legislation giving a Right to Manage (as provided in 1994) and substantial incentives to landlords, the current power holders
  - **Formal powers** and a related local board structure for local democratic control
  - **Local authority support**, and a basis in a history of tenant participation
  - **Funding and training** to support residents to develop management agreements and carry out their tasks, and the development of a group of independent training organisations to provide this support
  - **Continued central government interest** and priority over other service providers, and active management of any tensions between encouraging TMOs and other aims of housing policy.
12. The model could be applied outside housing, for example in other local government neighbourhood services, schools, health, but it will work best where users' knowledge of needs gives comparative advantage and where necessary technical skills could be acquired fairly quickly. It could be

applied on slightly larger scale, perhaps the low thousands of households. It could be applied in a weakened form, where service users take on less direct responsibility and concentrated on monitoring or a limited range of services.

13. Finally, the long and relatively well-documented experience of TMOs demonstrates that it is possible to create hundreds of new 'co-producing' organisations providing a small minority of the total service, for a cost in the low millions of pounds – although this has been over a period of ten to twenty years. TMOs seem to suggest that less advantaged members of the public can become involved in co-production of services when these opportunities for involvement are targeted on the key services they use. However TMOs did not form in most places, and where concentrated in particular situations: where local authorities and residents both had the motivation and ability to take up the opportunities created by legalisation and funding. It is also important to note that in addition to creating an ongoing burden on service users and activists, TMOs also create an ongoing support and regulatory burden on government and local authorities.

#### **Additional References:**

Further details of the material in this section can be found at:

McCabe, Al Chilton, L; Purdue, D; Wilson, M; Evans, L; Ardon, R (2007) *Learning to change neighbourhoods: Lessons from the Guide Neighbourhood programme: Evaluation report* London: CLG

Millward, L (2005) 'Benefits not barriers: a different way of attracting people to tenant participation?' Paper to Housing Studies Association Conference, York, April

NFTMOs data 2010 – database of members kept by NFTMOs (thanks to Trevor Bell of NFTMOs)

Price Waterhouse (1995): *Tenants in control: An evaluation of tenant-lead housing management organisations* DoE: HMSO

Tunstall, R; and Coulter, A (2006) *Turning the tide? 25 years on 20 unpopular council estates in England* Bristol: Policy Press

[www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/1812-progress-unpopular-estates.pdf](http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/1812-progress-unpopular-estates.pdf)  
[www.nftmos.com](http://www.nftmos.com)

## **Part Two: Capacity and potential to build the Big Society**

### **WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE EXTENT OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES? – Baljit Gill and Karen Cave, DCLG**

1. This section sets out some of the main evidence on the current extent of volunteering, community engagement, and trust. It is based on data from the DCLG Citizenship Survey, and the Hansard Society Audit of Political Engagement<sup>29</sup>
2. The question at issue is whether the patterns of participation set out below will have a material effect on the way in which the Big Society might operate in different places – explored in more detail in Ruth Lupton’s paper which follows. In this section we simply point to evidence of differences, focusing on
  - Empowering people so they can make decisions affecting their local area
  - The importance of community networks and spaces
  - Encouraging people to volunteer in improving their areas
3. We need also to be alert to the different opportunities which exist in the more deprived neighbourhoods. This is an issue which has been explored by the recent RSA Social Networks study<sup>30</sup> which suggests we should look more positively at the existing resources and networks in these areas, and that there are considerable opportunities, in the context of the emerging Big Society agenda, to develop a more detailed understanding of the capacity of these networks to support local empowerment and engagement.

#### **Empowering people so they can make decisions affecting their local area**

4. Currently, few people feel empowered - only **1 in 3** people think they can influence local decisions. There is no difference between the most deprived and least deprived area, though white people feel less able to influence decisions than other ethnic groups

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<sup>29</sup> The sources of the main figures in this section are referenced out at the end. The Citizenship Survey, the main resource used, is updated each quarter and so for the most up to date figures see the website [www.communities.gov.uk/communities/research/citizenshipsurvey](http://www.communities.gov.uk/communities/research/citizenshipsurvey)

<sup>30</sup> Jonathan Rowson, Steve Broome and Alasdair Jones 2010: Connected Communities: How social networks power and sustain the Big Society. RSA, London

- Current levels of feeling able to influence local decisions are low (37% feel they can)
  - The level of influence that people feel they have over local decisions is low and unchanged from 2003 (38%) to April-Dec 2010 (37%), despite this being a priority of the previous government.
  - The white ethnic group is less likely than other ethnic groups to feel able to influence local decisions: 38% compared with between 47% and 58% of the other main ethnic groups.
5. Poorer neighbourhoods don't think this matters as much as richer neighbourhood
- People in the least deprived areas are more likely to think 'it is important' to feel able to influence local decisions. (80% in the 10% least deprived areas compared with 72 - 73 % of people in the 30 per cent most deprived areas)
  - In 2008, those in the highest (AB) occupational classes were almost twice as likely as those in the lowest classes (DE) to say they would like to be involved in decision making
6. People feel they have no influence because they think institutions don't listen to them or treat their opinion with importance
- The chief reasons given by respondents to the Audit of Political Engagement<sup>31</sup> are:
    - 'Nobody listens to what I have to say' : 29% of people who don't feel able to influence decisions
    - 'Decisions are made without talking to the people' – 20%
    - 'The system doesn't allow for me to have an influence' – 19% ;
    - 'My opinion isn't important' – 14%; and
    - 'I'm not given the opportunity to have an influence' - 14%
7. Where people have something about which they feel strongly, having influence becomes more important. However, they only want to have an influence on local issues that affect them, are salient, and about which they feel strongly. And they have different priorities, and may not want to be involved in the process.
8. Lack of trust in institutions is more prevalent in poorer neighbourhoods, and undermines empowerment
- In the least deprived areas, 68% report a lack of trust in the council and 90% a lack of trust in the police compared with 58% and 75% in the most deprived areas
  - Low levels of trust in institutions, particularly in deprived areas will undermine efforts.

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<sup>31</sup> Hansard Society (2009) Audit of Political Engagement, 6. The 2009 Report.

- Other factors in these areas include a lack of shared values with other people, lack of know-how and digital exclusion.

### **The importance of community networks and spaces<sup>32</sup>**

9. Close bonds in deprived areas matter – but there are fewer bridging links.

- Deprived neighbourhoods can be home to sets of relationships that constitute a resource pool from which people can draw support and help to get by.
- These networks may have limited ‘linking’ and ‘vertical’ social capital .

10. Three in four people in one deprived area, New Cross Gate, Lewisham, London, knew someone with influence to change things locally.

- So one in four people didn't know anyone good at bringing people together, or who could help them contact someone with influence, power or responsibility to change things locally,
- And one in fifty of our respondents did not know anybody in their local area that supported them or helped them to make changes in any way.

11. Most ‘disengaged’ people do have social ties within their communities – but often they may be ‘familiar strangers’ like postmen or dustmen, or social caretakers.

- These figures could provide leverage points, but are underutilised.
- And they may not be the usual suspects, but ‘familiar strangers’
- It is seldom their ward councillor. More people recognised and found value in their postman than their local councillor.

12. A lack of shared values can make things worse, particularly in poorer areas<sup>33</sup>

- Factors such as the lack of trust in other people, or the lack of shared values, both more common in deprived areas, could undermine the Big Society.
- 90% feel people share the same values in the least deprived areas compared with about 60% in the most deprived.

13. Joining a group helps – but only 42% in poorest neighbourhoods do it (compared with 73% in the least deprived decile)

- Joining a group can provide access to numerous bridges between networks that are not otherwise available.

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<sup>32</sup> This section draws on the RSA Connected Communities Social networks report, referenced above. Also relevant is Hickman, P. 2010. Neighbourhood Infrastructure, ‘Third Places’ and patterns of social interaction

<sup>33</sup> Subsequent information in this section is from the Citizenship Survey

- This is not merely because of the activities of the group but because most group members will be members of other groups.
- But group membership is markedly lower in deprived areas (73% in the least deprived decile and 42% in the most deprived)

14. Community hubs, including pubs and sports clubs, are important for social contacts.

- They are an important aspect of community resilience and empowerment, which is important in context of cuts e.g. to libraries, and Sure Start
- They are valued media for interaction in lower income neighbourhoods, **especially shops, markets**
- Although all socio-demographic groups made use of such places, residents who spent most of their day at home (**because they were unemployed, in poor health, retired or had caring responsibilities**) were particularly likely to use these hubs.

15. Some residents were deterred from using some “third” places because;

- They perceived their regular users to be unwelcoming or even hostile
- They found it difficult to use because of ill-health or disability
- They were reluctant to venture from their homes after dark
- They lacked the ‘social confidence’ to do so.

### **Encouraging people to volunteer to improve their areas**

16. Looking at volunteering as interested in the broader question of people doing things to improve their areas, in the least deprived areas, three quarters of people pull together to improve their neighbourhood compared with only a half of those in the most deprived areas.

17. Only 1 in 4 people volunteer regularly in a group. Formal volunteering is most common for people from ‘wealthy achievers’ - prudent pensioners’ and ‘affluent greys’ categories.

#### **Looking at ‘Formal volunteering’<sup>34</sup>**

- Women were more likely than men to participate in both formal (28% compared with 23%) and informal volunteering (38% compared with 31%).
- Younger people (those aged under 35) were less likely than older people (those aged 35-74) to have participated in formal volunteering.
- Participation in regular formal volunteering was higher among those in higher socio-economic groups.
- People in the 10% most deprived areas are less likely to volunteer (16%) than those in the 10% least deprived areas (33%).

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<sup>34</sup> The Citizenship Survey definition of formal volunteering is ‘Giving unpaid help through groups, clubs or organisations to benefit other people or the environment’. This excludes giving money and activities related to job requirements.

18. It helps if you have more time, and are not working full time or looking after children.

- Work commitments were the most commonly-cited barrier to formal volunteering; 58% of people who did not regularly participate in formal volunteering gave this as a reason.

19. It helps if you are invited to do it - networks and community spaces are vital.

- 18% of this group gave 'not hearing about opportunities to help' as a barrier.

20. In poorer areas, people do 'help out'.

**'Informal volunteering'**<sup>35</sup>

- People in the 10% most deprived areas are slightly less likely to volunteer (30%) than those in the 10% least deprived areas (34%), but this difference is not statistically significant.

21. **But those who do volunteer or get involved in poorer areas are often dealing with far greater social problems** – it's not just about planting trees, but tackling the jobs on the estate, or helping plan for migrant arrivals. In poorer areas, volunteers may face anti-social behaviour, cultural barriers, conflicting interests of different groups, greater pressures on services, and deeply entrenched social problems. Previous work with local groups by DCLG suggested amongst their concerns were;

- A widespread lack of awareness and understanding in local government, other public agencies and the voluntary sector about the resident-led part of the community sector and the benefits that partnership with residents can bring. The approach of these agencies was described as 'Institutional patronising', and the grassroots level seemed to be off the radar or invisible to institutions.
- There needs to be a paradigm shift in how institutions behave.
- Community groups are 'passionate, but scary' and ought to challenge the norm and come up with improved ways of doing things. But local authorities would rather keep them 'locked in a drawer' until the occasions when they want to 'show you off'.
- People working as community members or volunteers are underestimated: perhaps they do not have the qualifications, lack a uniform, or do not have conventional premises e.g. they work from a car boot. 'When people know you're a volunteer, people look at you in a different way'. Officials can often be condescending.

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<sup>35</sup> The Citizenship Survey definition of informal volunteering is 'Giving unpaid help as an individual to people who are not relatives'.

**Additional References:**

Further details of the material in this section can be found at:

Department for Communities and Local Government (2010) 2008-09  
Citizenship Survey Empowered Communities Topic Report

Department for Communities and Local Government (2010) 2008-09  
Citizenship Survey Community Cohesion Topic Report

Department for Communities and Local Government (2010) 2008-09  
Citizenship Survey Volunteering and Charitable Giving Topic Report

Department for Communities and Local Government, Citizenship Survey  
2008-09: Cohesion Topic Report

Department for Communities and Local Government, 2008 Citizenship Survey  
Empowered Topic Report

Department for Communities and Local Government, Citizenship Survey,  
Statistical Release, April 2009-March 2010

Department for Communities and Local Government, 2008-09 Citizenship  
Survey Volunteering and Charitable Giving Topic Report

Hansard Society (2009) Audit of Political Engagement, 6. The 2009 Report.

## WHAT TRIGGERS ENGAGEMENT IN THE BIG SOCIETY? – Liz Richardson, Institute of Political and Economic Governance, University of Manchester; and LSE

1. This section examines some key empirical evidence<sup>36</sup> of drivers, enablers and barriers to building local community action and the Big Society. It does so by looking at four specific studies of which three were field experiments, using experimental techniques, including randomised controlled trials which are considered by many to be the ‘gold standard’ of evaluation, but which are relatively rare in public policy.

### Changing local authorities into mobilisers; and changing complainers into volunteers

2. How can a local authority, who comes into daily contact with thousands of its local residents, increase the number and range of people engaged in civic activity, and turn ‘complainers’ into active volunteers? In 2008-9, the Institute for Political and Economic Governance (IPEG) at the University of Manchester undertook a design experiment with Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council to try to answer this question.
3. Callers to the local authority customer Contact Centre reporting a problem or making a query were asked **if they wanted to get more involved in the neighbourhood**, after their initial query or complaint had been dealt with. This was an unusual step for a local authority to take. It was a seemingly small adjustment to the Contact Centre script. However, this was an important ‘nudge’<sup>37</sup> and also implied a fundamental shift in the institutional ‘default setting’ or ‘choice architecture’ - from seeing people as customers or service users, to seeing them also as potential citizens.
4. Existing practice by local government institutions as ‘official bodies’ suggests a limited and not fully effective mobilising role. Local government often advertises local events and activities, and most contribute funding to Volunteer Bureaux – although 2007-8 data<sup>38</sup> shows that only three per cent of adults found out about volunteering opportunities from Volunteer Bureaux, fewer than ten per cent through advertising, and over half by word of mouth. At the same time, each local government body conducts thousands of direct transactions with citizens and service users, but does not use these contact points as mobilising opportunities. A civic ‘ask’ is not made of residents during these routine service interactions. There may well be a reciprocal civic ask being made of the same citizens by the

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<sup>36</sup> This section draws on recent IPEG research and publications, detailed at the end. More detail can be found at [www.civicbehaviour.org.uk](http://www.civicbehaviour.org.uk), and in a new book on this and other civic experiments John, P; Cotterill, S; Liu, H; Richardson, L; Moseley, A; Nomura, H; Smith, G; Stoker, S and Wales, C (2011) *Nudge nudge, think think: experimenting with ways to change civic behaviour* London: Bloomsbury Academic

<sup>37</sup> Thaler, R.H. and Sunstein, C.R. (2009) *Nudge: Improving decision making in health, wealth and happiness* London: Penguin; John et al. 2011

<sup>38</sup> Agur, M., and Low, N. (2009) *2007-08 Citizenship Survey: Empowered Communities Topic Report* London: DCLG, p166

authority, for example, to join in a neighbourhood clean-up day. But that ask is often made by a different department, at a different time, through an indirect route (e.g. posters at a local school), and very usually generates extremely low returns.

5. In contrast, this project represented an institutional re-design of the normally one-way transactional relationship between citizen and authority to a two-way reciprocal relationship. It also drew on an American study of models of civic voluntarism<sup>39</sup>, which shows how vital 'the ask', or mobilisation, is for volunteering. Later work by Lowndes et al. (2006)<sup>40</sup> extends the civic voluntarism model and sets out an enhanced formal role for public institutions as mobilisers in their own right, and as mobilisers of a wider group of citizens beyond the institutions' own members or employees.
6. Initial resistance and wariness from some officers in the council illustrated the significance of the shift. From the start of the research, there had been some concern from local authority staff that there would be an adverse reaction from citizens to this change of approach. In particular the contact centre managers were worried that people phoning to report problems or make complaints might be aggravated by being invited to be proactive on neighbourhood issues; those reporting a problem with a local service would be angry at being asked to take action themselves. Members of staff were not convinced that people would welcome a change in the nature of the relationship.
7. These concerns were not borne out by citizens' responses. The research tested the assumptions about citizens' preferences. The doubts of members of staff proved to be unfounded among those citizens who took part. People were happy to be mobilised by public institutions. Citizens were generally supportive, with 92 per cent across both intervention and comparison groups agreeing that the council should encourage callers to get more involved.
8. Over two three-week periods, focused on just two neighbourhoods and two telephone 'lines' at the Contact Centre, 66 people signed up. There was a broad range by age, gender and ethnicity. A third had not previously been involved in civic activity. There were differences between those recruited from the more and less affluent neighbourhoods which reflected the different population profile, e.g. higher proportion of elderly people with mobility problems in the more deprived area.
9. However, the initial surge in interest was not translated into activity. The fundamental initial shift in how people were dealt with at the contact centre succeeded in creating a positive citizen response. But, in the first wave,

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<sup>39</sup> Verba, S., Schlozman, K. L., and Brady, H. (1995) *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press

<sup>40</sup> Lowndes, V., Pratchett, L., and Stoker, G. (2006) 'Diagnosing and Remediating the Failings of Official Participation Schemes: The CLEAR Framework', *Social Policy & Society* 5:2, 281–291

the experiment failed to capitalise on the initial expression of interest in the follow-up intervention. The menu of options offered to interested citizens was largely focused on attending public meetings or joining local community associations to help with their limited range of activities, in tightly prescribed roles. There were few options that fitted people's preferences.

The original intention was to offer a creative menu of voluntary options based on individuals' skills and interests. However, the authority was not aware that it was offering options that more suited itself and its skill set, rather than options tailored to the citizen. Participants in the initial wave intervention were offered an arguable uninspiring menu of involvement in existing neighbourhood groups and fora – easy for the authority to understand, based on an established repertoire of engagement skills, known entities, low supervision and transaction costs. In fact the newly engaged citizens would have preferred options which gave them a stronger voice, were more flexible, were less based on local authority led group activities or requiring citizens to set up new groups,

10. A second wave of the experiment started to correct this failure, although the speed at which this happened meant that we lost momentum with the initial group recruited. In the second wave the experiment used the things citizen's said they wanted to do to develop new options. For those wanting to use their views more constructively to improve services, the authority then started to set up a 'mystery shopping' scheme. For those wanting to offer help to neighbours, the authority facilitated a 'Good neighbours' scheme for residents to offer social support to isolated older people through a 'good morning' phone call.

### **Empowering people to take action – public recognition to encourage charitable giving**

11. Are people more or less likely to make a charitable donation if they receive public recognition for doing so? The example explored here was a randomised controlled trial (RCT) by IPEG at the University of Manchester which tested the effectiveness of two different "nudges" to try to persuade people to make a charitable donation.
12. Studies show that one way of encouraging people to give is to promise them **public recognition** as a thank you for making a donation. Practical examples of how public recognition is already used to promote giving include: the inclusion of the names of donor individuals and companies in brochures for public festivals and charitable events and prominent public displays of a list of sponsors in art galleries, theatres, community centres. Laboratory experiments indicate that donors appreciate the prestige they get from having their donations made public, and when donations are advertised in categories (e.g. gold, silver or bronze donors), people will more often give the minimum amount needed to appear in a higher category. 'Image motivation' describes how citizens may be motivated by how others perceive their behaviour: when individuals are seeking social

approval, they may choose to exhibit qualities that they think are widely regarded as 'good'.

13. There are other studies that support these concepts. For example the 'MINDSPACE' framework developed by the Institute for Government and Cabinet Office<sup>41</sup> uses similar ideas of commitment and ego to explain how we are motivated to behave in certain ways by our desire to be consistent with our public promises, and reciprocate acts, and act in ways that make us feel better about ourselves.
14. In this study, we wished to test the effectiveness of two nudges - asking for a pledge and offering public recognition - on charitable donations<sup>42</sup>. We were interested to discover whether making a pledge encourages people to give because they feel they have made a promise and want to see it through. We were also interested in whether households who are advised their donation will be made public are encouraged to give because their generosity will be advertised to their peers.
15. In the spring of 2010 we organized a campaign to collect books for use in school libraries in South Africa. The research was undertaken in partnership with Community HEART, a UK registered charity formed by anti-apartheid activist Denis Goldberg, which supports local self-help initiatives in South Africa. In the MINDSPACE framework, the use of a voluntary sector partner as our 'messenger' was critical. The research was undertaken with 12,000 households in two electoral wards in Manchester, UK. One of the wards is relatively affluent and largely made up of private housing; the other is relatively deprived, with a high proportion of social rented housing. Households were randomly assigned to one of three groups of equal size:
  - a pledge group which were asked to pledge;
  - a pledge-plus-publicity group, which got the pledge and who were also told that if they donated their names would be put up in a public place;
  - a control group who were asked to donate in a letter, but without the pledge or the offer of publicity.
16. Overall, 8% of households (1,000 households) donated books. We received 7,000 books in total. However, the pledge campaign on its own had no statistically significant effect. The **pledge campaign plus the offer of public recognition** did achieve a statistically significant effect compared to the control group, with an effect size of 22%. There were similar effects in the more and less deprived areas from different starting points, with higher levels of donations in the more affluent area as might be expected.
17. The impacts of the campaign were modest, but positive, and generated for relatively low cost for the research. The activity was also relatively low cost

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<sup>41</sup> <http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/images/files/MINDSPACE-full.pdf>

<sup>42</sup> This involved using the 'I' in MINDSPACE of the non-financial incentive of public recognition, and the 'S' of social norms, i.e. that we are strongly influenced by what others do and therefore making this more transparent will increase the desired behaviours.

for the givers; it is not clear whether this could be translated into a more intense or sustained citizen contribution.

### **Empowering people to take action – stimulating community self help in the Trafford Hall DIY Project**

18. Communities need the skills and tools to take control. How these are provided is a key question, and in particular what the balance should be between being provided by the state centrally (including the question about “guidance”), as opposed to being provided by the third or private sectors. But someone must engage with the communities to support them.
19. The “Trafford Hall DIY Project” was designed to stimulate and support intensive community action by small groups of active citizens. It was a five year action research project, led by LSE Housing at the London School of Economics, and delivered in partnership with Trafford Hall, home of the National Communities Resource Centre. It involved monitoring of participants through records of attendance, developmental and summative evaluation based on written feedback from 1,600 community volunteers, and around 100 in-depth interviews with community groups across the UK conducted during on-site visits to community projects in low-income neighbourhoods, as well as documentation and observation of the project as a piece of action research.<sup>43</sup>
20. The Project offered residential community training courses on ‘How-To’ subjects, e.g. how to work with young people, how to set up a community cafe. 20-25 people attended each course from different neighbourhoods across the UK. There was a small grant fund for community groups to put their ideas into practice after the courses. Trafford Hall have since used the community training and small grants model to develop a range of programmes including on community responses to climate change, community-led projects to tackle crime, and ways to get social enterprise.
21. Over five years, 1,800 people from over 700 community groups attended 93 training courses. 75% of training participants came from social housing estates, and three quarter of the study neighbourhoods were low-income areas of concentrated deprivation (Richardson, 2008, p-13-16), where participation levels tend to be lower than in more affluent areas, and require additional support for people unused to negotiating around formal or public systems. All came from small, mostly unincorporated, community groups. A third of the community participants had been involved in volunteering for under a year.
22. In terms of learning and action outcomes, 77% of training participants said they training had given them more motivation to take forward their ideas, 73% had acquired new facts and inspiration, and practical project ideas,

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<sup>43</sup> The findings of the research are published in Richardson, L (2008) *DIY Community Action: neighbourhood problems and community self-help* Policy Press: Bristol

and 42% had kept in touch with people they met on the courses after the event, developing networks of others doing similar things. Three out of five groups took some action towards setting up a project following the course; the other two groups out of five planned to. The project also gave small grants to 115 community projects. 17% of groups that attended training courses applied for small grants. Groups received grants to run small scale activities e.g. fishing trips, community cafes, youth activities, community green space improvements and allotments. Including other activities by the groups, we collected 476 examples of successful community-led work in neighbourhoods, including projects to rescue derelict communal and green spaces, changes to the delivery of public services, work to strengthen citizenship e.g. with young people,

23. Although the intervention was more about handholding (or ‘tickling’) than nudging, there are some common elements with the experimental studies set out above.
- The role of public recognition and reward for volunteers’ efforts given by a national programme.
  - The potential for strengthened motivation for community organizers when they can see that others are engaged in similar things.
  - The importance of an independent third sector organisation leading the programme.

### **Making public bodies transparent and strengthening democratic accountability – citizen groups lobbying local councillors**

24. In a well-functioning local democracy, locally-elected representatives work closely with community organisations and other groups<sup>44</sup>. However, relationships between councillors and community groups are not always as supportive or close as they could be. Many community organisations are keen to build relationships with members but unsure how to approach this. The Building Links project tested out different ways that community organisations could approach local councillors, get their attention, and win support for their work. How could both sides work together on relevant local issues and problems? The aim was to see which, if any, was the more effective approach.

25. The research project that IPEG conducted on these topics was a randomised controlled trial of citizen interest groups lobbying their local elected members. Here, we look at the third and fourth decentralisation principles together, ‘making public bodies transparent’ and ‘strengthening democratic accountability’.

26. We recruited eight community groups, spread across the country in eight different local authorities. Each group had a real local issue they wanted to tackle, but all were keen to make stronger connections to their local councillors. With each group, we devised two different letters on the same

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<sup>44</sup> See also Cotterill, S., and Richardson, L. (2011) *Inspiring Democracy: Community Anchors and Councillors Research Report* London:

topic. Each letter asked for help with the same problem, but one approach was information-rich, the other information-poor.

27. The groups then randomly selected half of the councillors in their authority, and then randomly allocated those councillors to receive one of the two letters. We measured the results by a) the number of replies to each of the two letters b) the helpfulness of the replies. Overall, only 18.5 per cent of councillors responded to either letter. There was a considerable variation according to local authority ranging from 4.2 to 30.6 per cent.
28. The information-poor letter received more responses overall, with the information-poor letter getting a 21.8% response, and the information-rich letter had a 15.3% response. However, this result was *not* statistically significant, and therefore it cannot be said that there was a difference between the two letters. Overall, the stronger treatment - in the form of the information-rich letter - does not yield a greater response than the information-poor letter.
29. Helpful responses included councillors expressing a willingness to meet, and offering face-to-face follow up discussions, or positively signposting the lobbyist on to colleagues, the issue would be better dealt with by someone else. Less helpful and dismissive responses included councillors stating it was not their remit or responsibility and the letter writer needed to go elsewhere, without positively signposting the lobbyist on to colleagues, referring them on, or even in many cases offering a relevant name to the writer.
30. There was a statistically significant difference in the helpfulness of the responses, with the information-rich letter encouraging councillors to pass on the request to another party in a helpful way.
31. What is noticeable is the low level of response to either of the letters, from community groups willing to help tackle what they see as a genuine local issue. This indicates an urgent need to further develop ward members as community leaders. It suggests that more work is needed to build relationships between community organisations and local members, and push harder to debate and broker ongoing battles over the legitimacy of different forms of democracy.
32. This project was not designed to be an attack on local elected members, the majority of whom perform very valuable service for their wards while being heavily criticised by the public. However, it suggests that UK local politicians may still be suffer from a perception of themselves as weak status and low power, and changes to decision making structures in local government may be needed to address this, e.g. stronger roles for Overview and Scrutiny. The response may reveals the context of British local government where representation is devalued and where elected councillors fail to develop a representative role, preferring to defer to the political executive and the professional sources of expertise in the officer corps. Local councillors may not have had enough confidence to respond

to a better-argued letter, but they realised they should pass it on to someone who presumably could in their view respond in a more effective way. As these local representatives have weak status and low power, it is possible that, under these conditions, informational lobbying is not as effective as it may be at the state or national level.

- 33.** Demands on local politicians have substantially increased in the last decade. Another possible explanation of the responses may be that a rise in the number of internal organisational and party political demands has left less time to represent the people who voted them in, or process lobbying requests from unknown bodies. Some preliminary follow up research for this project also suggests councillors feel overwhelmed by irrelevant paperwork and demands. Local authorities could manage their communications with members to allow members to focus on their priorities.

**Additional References:**

Further details of the material in this section can be found at:

Lupia, A. and Sin, G. (2003), 'Which public goods are endangered?: How evolving communication technologies affect the logic of collective action', *Public Choice* 117: 315-331.

<http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/ipeg/research/documents/FinalResearchProjectReportPDF.pdf>

## MANAGING RISK AND PROMOTING RESILIENCE: THE BIG SOCIETY AND SPATIAL POLARISATION –Ruth Lupton, LSE

1. Does it matter at all if there is variation in the take-up of Big Society-type activities in different areas of the country? Levels of influence and volunteering already vary by area. With the new rights and greater freedoms for councils, there will be many more opportunities for communities to get involved, and in the context of spending cuts there will also be greater urgency for people to get involved in prioritising spending and also in looking within their communities for the resources to help themselves (time to help someone, to volunteer, money).
2. So some variation is inevitable, and it may be also argued that some variation in service delivery is desirable, if this reflects difference in preferences between communities. By the same token, some difference in outcomes might also be acceptable or even desirable. One community, for example, might prefer to tolerate worse outcomes on a particular issue (for example more potholes in the roads) as a trade off against better outcomes in another (eg reading standards in schools).
3. These arguments depend on the operation of a fully functioning participative democracy, in which people have equal opportunities and capabilities to exercise their rights, and to exercise voice. If this is not the case, decisions about the distribution of outcomes are made by some people and not others, leading to some people/areas getting better services while others miss out. There is the potential for this to lead to widening gaps in outcomes and between rich and poor (if the rich add to their services while the poor maintain theirs at the same level), and also potentially to absolutely worse services and outcomes for the poor if they are unable to step in to maintain services previously provided by the state).
4. Either situation (the latter in particular) is arguably:
  - Unfair
  - More expensive in the long run (for example if preventive services cannot be delivered)
  - Wasteful of human capacity
  - Detrimental to social mobility
  - Bad for everyone, if the arguments of Wilkinson and Pickett's book *The Spirit Level*<sup>45</sup> are accepted
5. A further risk is that the unequal exercise of new decision-making and service delivery options could lead to perceived unfairness ("why has x group got y service, when z group has not?"). Unless carefully managed,

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<sup>45</sup> Wilkinson R and Pickett K, 2009; *The Spirit Level* Penguin London

this can be divisive and lead to conflict between groups. Government intervention to distribute services and outcomes evenly has been used in the past precisely because people have different capacities and propensities to become involved, and tend to be motivated by their own self interest. Government has had a role in smoothing the distribution of services and ensuring that decision-making processes are transparent and fair. New ways need to be found to manage these risks in a situation of smaller government.

6. What, then, are the risks which need to be managed in the light of the variation in levels of deprivation across communities? Frist, **at an individual level, poverty/disadvantage presents risks to participation in the Big Society. Therefore areas of concentrated poverty and disadvantage are likely to have lower levels of participation.**
7. As covered in more detail above, people in low skilled occupations and lower social classes are least likely to volunteer for multiple reasons which include their specific capacities (experience, confidence, skill, trust etc) but also the economic realities that they face, including:
  - Lack of money (for transport, childcare, etc),
  - Poorer health (own and family),
  - Work commitments (long or unsocial hours),
  - Stresses or time involved in managing on low income, including caring responsibilities, depression and anxiety,
  - (for some) transient or insecure housing.
8. Measures which focus on lifting people out of poverty, providing free support services, and preventing labour market exploitation (for example, enforcing the National Minimum Wage and raising it to a living wage), are all likely to free up capacity to participate in the Big Society.
9. We therefore need a clear focus on understanding these more structural constraints on participation, as well as focusing building personal capacities. Burchardt's (2008) work on time and income poverty<sup>46</sup> is an example of an analytical approach which could support analysis of these constraints. Burchardt identifies not only those who suffer income poverty and time poverty, but those who have no capability to increase their income above the poverty threshold without reducing their time below a minimum level, or conversely people who cannot increase the amount of disposable time they have without pushing their income below the poverty line. Analysis of multiple constraints like these could help identify people who are genuinely unable to participate regardless of skills, confidence and other dimensions of cooperation.

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<sup>46</sup> Burchardt, T. (2008) *Time and Income Poverty*. London: CASE

10. Second, **spatial patterns of disadvantage are persistent and become more marked when inequality increases and during downturns.** We know, there are very sharp differences in collective resources between areas, as illustrated in the report of the National Equality Panel (2010)<sup>47</sup>. Lack of capacity to participate is therefore likely to have a strong spatial distribution.
11. Although some areas do recover from acute disadvantage (for example if they are gentrified, if new housing is built, or more rarely if there are new concentrations of employment), much evidence reveals that spatial patterns of disadvantage are very persistent. For example:
- Of the 600 communities in the top 10 per cent in England for unemployment in 2009, three-quarters were in the top 10 per cent in 2005 when unemployment was much lower, and nearly half had been in the top 10 per cent in boom and bust since 1985 (Tunstall with Fenton 2009<sup>48</sup>)
  - Of the areas in the top decile for benefits receipt in 1999, 86 per cent were still in the top decile in 2005, six years later (Palmer et al 2006<sup>49</sup>).
12. We should expect, therefore, that patterns of constraints on participation in the Big Society will also be persistent.
13. Moreover, as Dorling et al. (2007)<sup>50</sup> have shown, spatial inequalities tend (not surprisingly) to increase when society becomes more unequal overall, and there are also cyclical effects. During recessions, area unemployment rates tend to diverge as those who occupy the most marginal positions in the labour market are most likely to lose their jobs (see figure below from Tunstall with Fenton).

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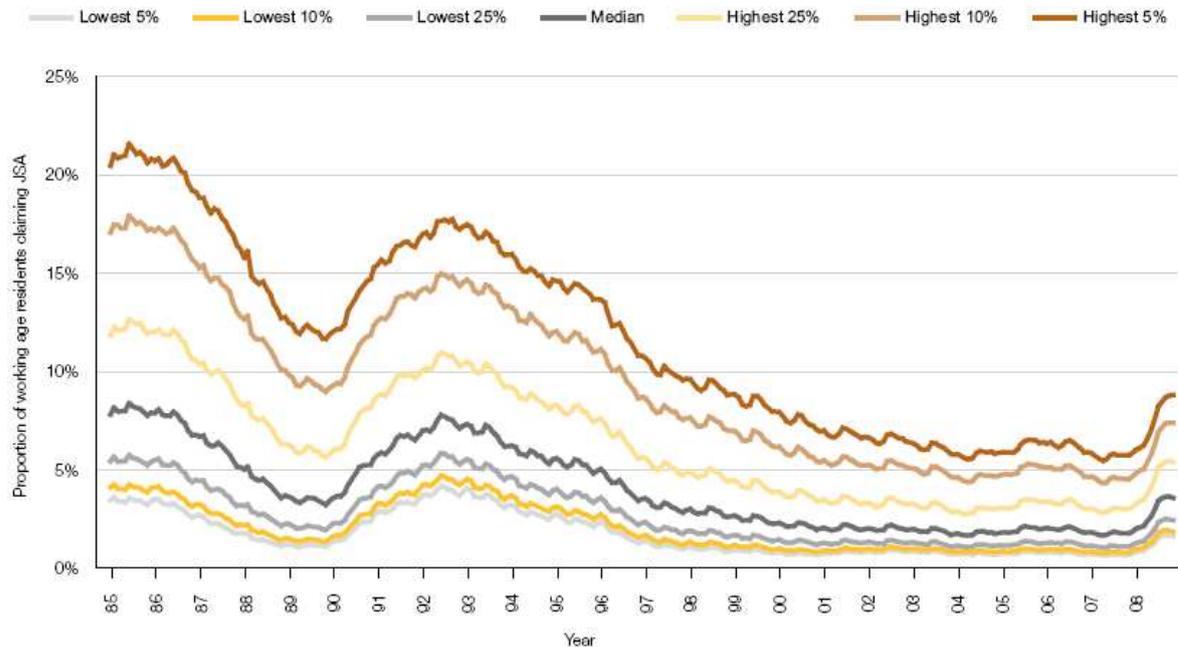
<sup>47</sup> Hills, J. et al (2010) *An anatomy of economic inequality in the UK: Report of the National Equality Panel*. London: Government Equalities Office and CASE

<sup>48</sup> Tunstall, R. with Fenton, A. (2009) *Communities in Recession*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

<sup>49</sup> Palmer, G, MacInnes, T and Kenway, P (2006) *Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York.

<sup>50</sup> Dorling et al. (2007): *Poverty Wealth and Place in Britain 1968-2005*. Bristol: The Policy Press for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation

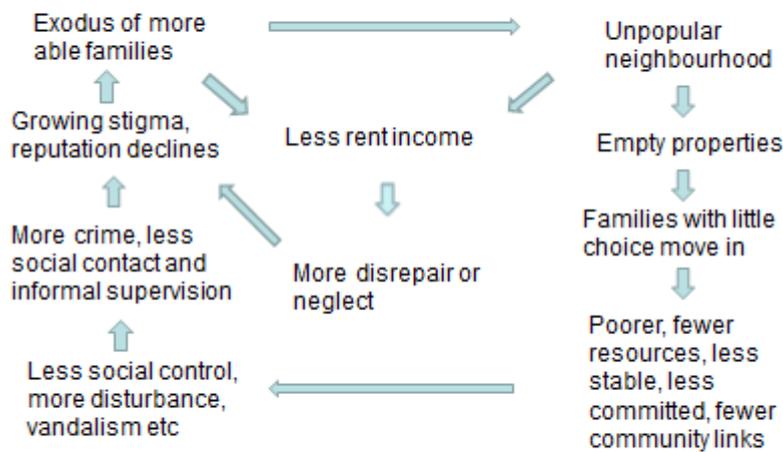
Figure 1: Different groups of postcode sectors by JSA claim rates in England 1985-2009



14. Third, **some poor areas are particularly vulnerable to rapid decline which can inhibit/destroy community involvement.** Evidence from previous recessions shows that some poor areas are particularly vulnerable to very rapid decline. Lupton and Power<sup>51</sup> have described a cycle of decline (shown below) in which neighbourhood unpopularity (fuelled perhaps by crime or anti-social behaviour or simply by location and quality of housing stock in a situation where there is surplus housing because people are moving away in search of work) leads to high numbers of empty properties, further social problems, declining confidence, surveillance and supervision, more people leaving and so on.

<sup>51</sup> Lupton, R. (2003) *Poverty Street: The Dynamics of Neighbourhood Decline and Renewal*. Bristol: the Policy Press; and Power, A. (1996) Area-Based Poverty and Resident Empowerment. *Urban Studies* 33(9)

## Some are vulnerable to very rapid decline



Source: Lupton (2003), adapted from Power (1996)



15. In this situation, neighbourhoods experience a decline in their physical environment and a withdrawal or decline of private and public sector services. Crucially, residents also feel that they can no longer control conditions in the neighbourhood, and that no-one in authority is helping them. While a small number of active residents tend to persist in battling for action, the majority become more distrustful of neighbours and less likely to participate, leading to further decline of social order.
16. This cycle of decline poses a real risk to the Big Society. Since the early 1990s recession, measures have been taken to prevent this scenario developing again. In particular, much surplus housing stock has been removed. However, there may still be neighbourhoods that are at risk of rapid decline: identification of these and early intervention needs to be a priority.
17. **All of these points mean that current economic circumstances create a particular challenge for implementing the Big Society in poor areas. So what can be done about it?** Clearly there are specific messages about how to encourage and sustain participation: many of these were covered in the earlier papers. However, government can also actively manage the impact of economic decline on poor neighbourhoods, to create conditions in which the Big Society has a better chance to flourish.
18. Evidence from families living in low income neighbourhoods over the last 10 years suggests that neighbourhood-level investment and action makes a real difference to people's lives and to their feelings about their

neighbourhoods and their propensity to get involved (Power (2007)<sup>52</sup>). Key points include:

- Giving real influence over local services (e.g. Sure Start model),
- Responsive front line service providers (people!) providing 'eyes and ears', visible supervision, and a quick response,
- Co-ordinated neighbourhood management,
- Affordable things for people (especially) to do (e.g. classes, free swimming for kids),
- ...with staff involvement as well as volunteers,
- Better quality mainstream services e.g. schools, with funding to cover additional challenges,
- In fast changing communities, brokering relations between groups, and enabling residential stability.

19. Mismanagement of major decisions (for example, housing redevelopment) can, however, destroy the goodwill gained by these smaller actions.

20. Overall, it is likely that more consideration needs to be given to specific interventions to support Big Society activities in areas where there is most risk that they won't occur spontaneously, although these on their own are unlikely to ensure equal outcomes. Government needs to continue with wider policies to prevent rising inequality and those which maintain investment in the most vulnerable areas. In a situation where responsibility for such areas is devolved to local government, this could include prioritising direct service delivery in poorer areas, or prioritising voluntary sector grants in such areas. There may also be mileage in emphasising the philanthropic elements of the Big Society at a local level (i.e. helping the community next door).

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<sup>52</sup> Power, A. (2007) *City Survivors: Bringing Up Children in Disadvantaged Neighbourhoods*. Bristol: the Policy Press

## **Discussions**

At the DCLG meeting (attendance list at the annex) several points were made in discussion of the papers. These included:

### **Government Action**

- Laws and regulatory frameworks do help to frame what citizens do. International examples were given to illustrate this point, for example, a law in Spain states that all blocks which are built have to have a community of neighbours association and it is this association who have responsibility for managing the blocks.
- There is a role for local authorities here to enable them to be better at doing things. How best can central government support local authorities in doing this and help them to be in a position to do more. At the same time there may be a role for government to inform local authorities and community groups of the vision and needs going forwards.
- In terms of Big Society lessons, what are the quick things that can be done quickly, and of these, which things can lead on to other things? Did the evidence suggest that unless there is resource from government, things won't happen quickly? It was suggested that collective groups of people, for example, housing associations and community groups, get together to discuss how quick wins could be achieved. This could be done perhaps with government support.
- Should government support emerging local activity in an integrated and coordinated way? Is there is a need for government to act either to provide funding or a steer?
- Understanding barriers to local action which stem from central or local government is a key area of current government focus, as is a desire to share local examples of good practice.
- In what other ways can central government set out their vision for the Big Society and Decentralisation agendas to help ensure that people are clear what it is about?

### **Learning from the past**

- How replicable is the example around TMOs working in terms of cost. We have different challenges to face, different communities coming together where there are tensions. We shouldn't have different sources of community funding going to different groups or communities.

- It should be acknowledged that there are many dimensions to the Big Society; there are a lot of separate different elements involved i.e. funding, fairness, scaling up. The TMOs are a good example which show what you can have/do with government support, and which emphasise the role training and support can play in these approaches.
- There is an issue of how we intervene. With more limited money and no central government spend, how we can ensure that any available resources be directed in the most effective way. There may be a role for local authorities but we need to learn from past investment what is cost effective.
- Central to this is the issue of joining-up which can be demonstrated by the success of neighbourhood management and TMO schemes which successfully demonstrated the benefits to a joined-up approach.

### **Motivation and capacity building**

- If local people and institutions don't take up the opportunities to be involved then nothing will happen. But there is also the wider issue that if people don't know how to do things, then how will they be able to take part in these opportunities. There needs to be an awareness of opportunities, the encouragement of these opportunities and once these are taken up, people need to develop their skills. Who needs to do what to get that change to happen more quickly?
- Support and development are important as if you want to work in deprived areas; previous models of intervention were highly expensive.
- There is a key question of what are the generic types of support that people will need if they are to participate in the Big Society, and who might and should provide it. This could be self help, private sector support, social enterprise, and other options including local government.
- It was suggested that having some form of central framework for citizens and community groups would be helpful.
- There was a need to manage expectations for instance in the giving of their time. It also needs to be recognised that if you do something, it can affect your self worth and status.
- In terms of measuring certain types of involvement, there is not a coherent way of measuring or valuing certain types of key community activities such as looking after a neighbour or a relative, or other very informal but often frequent activities. This presents the issue of informal volunteering taking place more regularly than is commonly believed. There is evidence from the Family Futures project that volunteering

amongst families in low income neighbourhoods is prominent. It was felt that there is evidence to suggest that people do care and are helping out.

- Some sharing of experience and approaches may be useful on a peer to peer basis. Some communities should assist those communities who are unable to support themselves.

### **Risks and opportunities**

- Some local authorities are hesitant in their approach to handing control over to citizens or groups.
- In terms of risk, it was thought that you have to allow people to take the risk. Once you free up the system and the democratic process, you may expect to have some tension if things don't work out. Linked to this are the cultural issues – there may be a long way to go until people are less risk averse. There is also a burden on activists.
- Have we really understood the fairness issue? How will we address fairness? Fairness is an issue which needs to be considered and has been coming up in recent debates, for example, on free schools.
- The issue was raised as to whether it matters if the Big Society is different in different places? It could be a good thing to have a variation of delivery approaches.

## **CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS**

Stephen Aldridge is Director of Analysis and Innovation and Chief Economist at the Department of Communities and Local Government

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Dr Rebecca Tunstall is a Lecturer in Housing at the London School of Economics and member of CASE.

## ANNEX A - EVENT ATTENDANCE

The following departments were represented

<b>Division</b>	<b>Department</b>
Communities Analysis Division	DCLG
Analysis & Innovation	DCLG
Local Economies & Regeneration Analysis	DCLG
Big Society Programme Team	DCLG
Integration	DCLG
Local Place Management Team	DCLG
Local Government Research Unit - Decentralisation Analysis	DCLG
Maximising Operational Productivity	DCLG
Decentralisation Team	DCLG
Race Strategy and Partners	DCLG
Public Services Team	Office for Civil Society, Cabinet Office
Social Action Team	Office for Civil Society, Cabinet Office
Strategy Unit, Big Society	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Local and Community Policy Division	Department for Education
Big Society Unit, Local & Community Policy Division	Department for Education
Analysis and Research Division, Children, Young People and Families Directorate	Department for Education
Big Society	Department of Energy and Climate Change
Community energy online services	Department of Energy and Climate Change
Economic Development Directorate	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills