

**Local Government Leadership**  
 Local Government House  
 Smith Square  
 London SW1P 3HZ  
 Telephone 020 7187 7388  
 Fax 020 7187 7383  
 Email [info@localleadership.gov.uk](mailto:info@localleadership.gov.uk)  
[www.local.gov.uk](http://www.local.gov.uk)



Great places need ambitious leadership to inspire local communities and create a better future for the people and localities they represent.

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The Local Government Group is made up of six organisations which support, promote and improve local government.



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# Building a Civic Community

The ten principles to delivering the Big Society in Westminster

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# Foreword

**The Rt Hon Greg Clark MP**

Minister for Decentralisation, Department for Communities and Local Government

Westminster has long been one of the most innovative and far sighted councils in the country. It is entirely fitting then that in this publication they have found a way to be among the first local authorities to respond to the invitation to renewal offered by ‘The Big Society’. Radical in scope the authors argue for a fundamental shift in the way that Westminster should go forward testing each decision by its ability to return control to civic organisations.

The Prime Minister has called for every locality to develop their version of the Big Society, believing that the best practice and the most inspired ideas will spread from one community to another. Consequently, I hope that Westminster will not only be among the first to set out their local vision, but also among the many who will seek to develop an agenda of their own to suit the places and causes that they hold dear. Such efforts are at the heart of the Coalition’s radical and passionately held decentralisation vision.

In central government we have been working to turn departments upside down. Instead of them being solely focused upward and inward on the needs of Ministers we are ensuring that they are now more likely to face downward and outward so as to

be of real assistance to neighbourhoods nationwide. We have launched vanguard areas to test new innovations and have established a team of bureaucracy busters to wipe away the petty rules, central targets and risk aversion that so often stifles public sector reform, community empowerment and philanthropic action. This is only the beginning of a journey that will see us drive power, resources and information to the most local level.

This publication calls the present moment an “opportunity to fundamentally rethink the role of local government – what it does and how does it”. This is certainly the case and this publication makes a vital contribution to furthering that debate. I look forward to many others in the months to come.

# Introduction

**Cllr Colin Barrow**  
Leader, Westminster City Council



Over the last two decades councils have been stifled in their ability to deliver and shape local services. Onerous performance frameworks and a one sized fits all mentality driven from Whitehall resulted in reduced freedoms and ability to seek innovative solutions to local problems.

We now have in place a government ostensibly committed to devolving power to neighbourhoods, to communities and to the individual. And we have a government seemingly committed to fundamentally rethinking and redefining the relationship between the state and the citizen. We ourselves, in local government, must recognise this changing environment and respond accordingly.

In meeting the challenges we face, simply cutting and reducing budgets is too simplistic and will ultimately fail the communities that we exist to serve. Instead we must seize this opportunity to fundamentally rethink the role of local government – what it does and how it does it.

If central government can loosen its ties and trust local government more, then we in turn must do the same and have confidence in voluntary and community groups to play an active role in their own local services and to shape their own neighbourhoods.

At the most basic level we too must rethink the relationship between the state at the local level and the citizen. This is the challenge that all of us in local government must now consider. And of course, there will be different solutions, different ideas and, ultimately, different models to tackle different issues in different parts of the country. This is the beauty of localism.

At its heart lies the belief that communities and neighbourhoods must be empowered. Empowered with the information to allow them to make informed decisions and choices; and empowered to play an active part in the running and delivery of public services in order to change their communities.

This is, I believe, is what lies at the core of the government's Big Society agenda.

I believe that local government and each council, working in partnership with their local communities, must now get on and shape its own particular brand and version of the Big Society.

<sup>1</sup> For more information on the ward budget scheme see 'Neighbourhood power: devolution with a difference' available at [www.local.gov.uk/leadership/current/publications](http://www.local.gov.uk/leadership/current/publications)

And why is this so important?

It will allow communities the ability to shape their own neighbourhoods and to have a real say over their local services. And it will allow us to truly tailor our services to meet the particular requirements of our own communities, free from centrally imposed restrictions.

This is of course not something new. Those of us in local government have been working and supporting local communities and the voluntary sector for years. And in Westminster we already have our highly successful ward budget scheme that has been empowering local communities over the past few years<sup>1</sup>. What is new is the pace, depth and radicalism that is open to us to now drive this agenda.

Westminster's version of the Big Society or Civic Community will release the potential of our citizens to improve shared quality of life by developing a stronger sense of community responsibility.

We see voluntarism as a better way than the state to develop and deliver many local services which had their roots in community provision, before they were effectively nationalised as the state took control of areas of service delivery.

In crafting Westminster's version, we have developed ten principles that will guide our response. These principles will shape and define our future interaction with our communities and citizens and the responsibilities that we will have to them. They will shape our future services and how we will deliver them. They will rebalance the relationship between state and citizen so that local people and local communities have much greater control and say over local services and their local neighbourhoods. Taken together they act as clear direction for the way that the council will move forward to meet the challenges we face and placing real power and control in the hands of our communities.

# Rising to the challenge

# 1

Westminster City Council is committed to empowering local residents and communities and firmly believes in the principle that powers are exercised at the lowest effective and practical level.



The emergence of the Big Society poses a number of questions both in terms of the role that the state can play in supporting this concept, but additionally in how much and how far the individual or community can play in delivering and shaping their own local services.

Further thought needs to be given as to what this model might mean for public service delivery. However, it is clear that there will need to be a fundamental shift in thinking both within the public sector and externally among those groups and individuals that would be expected to play an increased role in the delivery of the Big Society.

The public sector will need to focus more on promoting responsibility at all levels of society – be that personal, professional, civic or corporate. Furthermore, any Big Society model of service delivery requires an active citizenry to deliver its objectives. Whilst recognising that it will not always be possible to devolve services to their ‘natural’ level – capacity needs to be in place for services to be devolved.

In practice that devolutionary intent would mean a range of services delivered at different levels – policy makers, both nationally and regionally, need to recognise, and be comfortable with, this managed difference. It also raises questions about the public sector’s appetite for the risks inherent in voluntary and community sector provision and their capability and capacity to take over and run local public services and other community assets.

Provided they are, devolution at all levels of government offers substantial scope to reshape the relationship between citizen and state.

This publication seeks to explain Westminster City Council’s approach to the Big Society; why it believes adopting a Westminster model of the Big Society is needed; the principles that it will use in implementing its approach; those areas where it will look to deliver its approach both internally, within the council, and among the wider community, and initial thoughts on those projects that could be used to kick-start Westminster’s own Big Society.

# Defining the Big Society



The Government's ambition is that the Big Society will help to replace 'big government', and to roll back the state. It is premised on the simple idea that 'we can all do more'.

As set out by the government, there are three strands to the Big Society agenda:

- **Social Action** – which involves citizens giving their time, effort and sometimes money to causes around them
- **Public Service Reform** – getting rid of centralised bureaucracy, giving professionals more freedom, and opening up public services to new providers like charities, social enterprises and private companies
- **Community Empowerment** – creating neighbourhoods who are in charge of their own destiny, who feel their involvement can shape their area.

There are three techniques to galvanise these three strands:

- **Decentralisation** – pushing power away from central government to local government and down to communities, neighbourhoods and individuals
- **Transparency** – providing people with the information they need about government departments
- **Providing finance** – paying public service providers by results

In addition, the Government has announced a number of initial projects that it believes will assist in helping to define and deliver the Big Society. Such initiatives provide a useful indication of the Government's existing thinking and will inform the development of Westminster's approach.

The Government's initial response includes a commitment to:

- creating National Centres of Community Organising to train a new generation of community organisers and measures to support the creation of neighbourhood groups, especially in the most deprived areas
- introduction of a National Citizenship Service to give 16 year olds the chance to develop the skills needed to be active and responsible citizens
- giving public sector workers a new right to form employee owned co-operatives and bid to take over the services they deliver
- making it easier to set up and run a charity, social enterprise or voluntary organisation and working straight away to identify and reduce unnecessary red tape
- getting resources into the sector by instituting a Big Society Bank, using money from dormant accounts to invest in social goals
- encouraging a social norm of volunteering and philanthropic giving and instituting a national day to celebrate and encourage social action.



The Prime Minister and a number of key government Ministers have also set out their thoughts on the Big Society agenda:

**“Our alternative to big government is not no government – some reheated version of ideological laissez-faire. Nor is it just smarter government. Because we believe that a strong society will solve our problems more effectively than big government has or ever will, we want the state to act as an instrument for helping to create a strong society. Our alternative to big government is the big society.”**

Rt Hon David Cameron MP  
Prime Minister

**“There is no other view in Whitehall other than to understand how local communities can achieve their version of the Big Society. We want to see ideas spreading from one part of the country to another without ever having appeared in a government white paper.”**

Rt Hon Greg Clark MP  
Minister for Decentralisation, Communities and Local Government

It is important to recognise that the Big Society concept is fluid and is still under development. However, the following questions are intended to provide further clarity as to whether a project or initiative supports the Big Society agenda. These questions have been developed following analysis of Big Society literature and should be considered as Westminster and other councils develop their own approach:

- does the project/initiative aim to **empower communities** to address local issues?
- does it aim to **increase individual and social responsibility**?
- does it contribute to **creating self-sustaining modes** of service delivery?
- does it contribute to breaking the public sector monopoly on assets and services in order to increase choice for the citizen?
- does it **promote the role of voluntary and community sector organisations in tackling social problems**?
- will it help **deliver a smaller state and bigger civic society**?

**“We need a Big Society, that derives its strength and compassion from the energy and vigour of millions of active citizens, formal and informal organisations independent of the state, and neighbourhoods where neighbourliness touches every life.”**

Rt Hon Francis Maude MP  
Minister for the Cabinet Office

**“We could replace big government with the Big Society. And we can make localism a reality. Not because it’s an economic necessity. But because it’s the best way to get things done. To run services, to build a stronger economy and a stronger society.”**

Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP  
Secretary of State, Communities and Local Government

# Listening to our communities in shaping the Big Society

# 3

We understand that the Big Society must be bottom-up, led and shaped by communities and neighbourhoods themselves. Any attempt to impose the Big Society from above is unlikely to succeed.

**By Christmas 2010, Westminster will have at least ten Big Society schemes in place that have been initiated by the people of Westminster and supported by the council. By July 2011 the aim is to have fifty and over one hundred by the time of the Olympics in 2012.**

Westminster has begun the process of engaging with its communities in helping to define its approach to the Big Society.

In addition, Westminster already has in place its highly successful neighbourhood ward budget scheme that it will seek to build upon and learn from as it develops a comprehensive approach to the Big Society.

On 1 July 2010, Westminster launched the Living City Conversation, inviting local residents and businesses in Westminster to enter into a new relationship with the council.

The council is actively asking the people of Westminster how public services could be delivered differently. How, for example, could we encourage people to get more involved in their neighbourhoods? How could the council help individuals and others to make a difference to the lives of people in Westminster?

Westminster is also holding a number of specific events to actively engage and listen to the views of community based groups and Westminster businesses to further explore areas where it can take forward the Big Society agenda.

The council is ambitious to make this agenda a reality and as such the Leader of the council outlined earlier this year the timetable for initiating the Big Society in Westminster. By Christmas 2010, Westminster will have at least ten Big Society schemes in place that have been initiated by the people of Westminster and supported by the council. By July 2011 the aim is to have fifty and over one hundred by the time of the Olympics in 2012.



# Building on the Westminster's ward budget scheme



Westminster has been at the forefront nationally of devolved decision making and championing community based projects. We will look to use this knowledge and experience to support the development of the Big Society in Westminster.

Westminster, like many other authorities, has extensive experience of helping and supporting the voluntary and community sectors that we will use to help shape our response to this agenda.

The Westminster ward budget scheme introduced dedicated ward budgets over a two year period, 2008-2010. Local Government Leadership (then the Leadership Centre for Local Government) helped the council develop the programme, which was designed to give a greater voice to local communities and empower members to act as more effective local champions. As of April 2008, £100,000 per annum was available to each ward in Westminster to spend on local projects.<sup>2</sup>

The spending of ward budgets is a member-led decision based on their knowledge of the local area and priorities. The scheme follows a number of basic principles for projects:

- be locally derived
- meet an identified need
- improve social, economic or environmental well-being
- be additional to existing provision
- not undermine existing council policies or service delivery
- be lawful.

Three neighbourhood officers work in close liaison with members and are responsible for researching, commissioning and monitoring projects.

During the pilot two-year programme over 400 individual projects were funded. These broadly fell into the following themes:

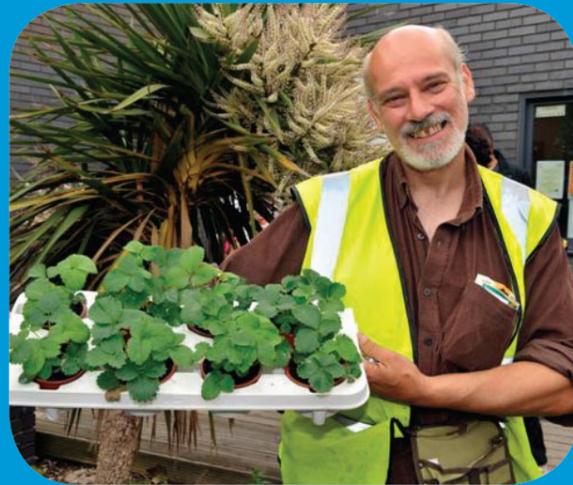
- activities for children
- older people
- community focused
- community safety
- employment
- greening
- public realm.

We believe that we can use the ward budget scheme as a basis for Westminster's response to the Big Society and learn from it. However, given the potential importance of the Big Society to our communities and neighbourhoods and its ability to radically change the present structure and role of the council, it is clear that we must look to develop a clear framework, including a set of principles and statement of purpose that will further guide and shape our response.

<sup>2</sup> For more information on the ward budget scheme see 'Neighbourhood power: devolution with a difference' available at [www.local.gov.uk/leadership/current/publications](http://www.local.gov.uk/leadership/current/publications)

## Ward budget case studies

### Let's Go, Let's Grow Church Street ward



Let's Go, Let's Grow is a community gardening initiative, founded by a local resident, Mike Wohl. It has a core group of 30 residents who have turned disused spaces into community gardening areas. Despite not having a garden, Mike became inspired when he realised how cheap and easy it would be to grow food by planting seeds in Chinese takeaway containers. He says, "My balcony became choc-a-bloc with plants. I started to take seedling plants to local events to encourage other people to do the same thing."

After approaching the council with his proposals, Mike was provided with funding from the ward budget scheme, in order that he could start a number of new projects in the local area. The funding provided; physical improvements to a kitchen garden enabling more residents

to use the facility; the setting up of a girls-only growing group; work with the Youth Offending Team to get young people to install and help plant balcony boxes for older residents; the installation of an urban farm using disused areas over sheds and garages including the sitting of a bee hive, and the starting up of a food co-op.

Since the funding has been provided two seed planting workshops have been held for residents using the balcony boxes; a bee hive has been purchased; the urban farm has been set up and herb and salad leaves are being planted by local residents. The success of this project has inspired other wards and communities to create something similar. The St John's Wood area are keen to start their own food growing project and the Queen's Park councillors have plans for a growing site on one of the estates in the area.



### Glastonbury House planters Warwick ward

Glastonbury House is a sheltered housing block for older residents situated in the south of Westminster. The residents and the local community groups around the block wanted to make better use of the redundant planters outside the building. With funding from the local Warwick councillors, last year, they purchased hand tools, seeds, manure, a windowsill greenhouse and seed trays. Twelve groups, comprised of residents of the block, other local residents and local voluntary groups such as Open Age now manage at least one planter each.

The success of all those involved in the project was celebrated at a garden fete in August 2010. The fete was arranged by

the local estate office, based at Glastonbury House, with the prizes and refreshments being funded from the councillors ward budget this year. The best planter competition was won by Open Age.

Jim Butress, a judge at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show, remarked when judging the recent residents' competition that "The area would have been a jungle without what the residents have created and they should be very proud of their hard work and making the area livelier."

One of the residents who started his planter recently is now setting up a gardening club for all involved.



## Harrow Road Community Choir Harrow Road ward

In response to demand from local residents, the Harrow Road ward councillors chose to allocate some of their ward budget funds to establish a community choir for local residents. The council commissioned local concert hall, Wigmore Hall to run the project which began in September 2009.

The first few months saw a significant level of publicity undertaken to promote the choir and a series of taster sessions were offered at the local Academy to encourage a wide range of people to get involved. Following this period of recruitment the choir was officially launched in January 2010. It was structured as weekly rehearsals over a ten-week period culminating in the group putting on their own concert at Wigmore Hall on 21 March 2010.

The repertoire was chosen by the project team from a wide range of different musical traditions. This included folksongs from around the world (England, Iceland, South Africa, Hungary); gospel and classical. The repertoire was chosen to be both accessible and challenging to the participants who themselves represented a variety of ages, ethnicities and languages. The songs were taught in the original languages so participants sang in Icelandic, French, English, Latin and Xhosa.

The one-hour-long concert at Wigmore Hall saw the choir perform all the repertoire the group had learnt since January, including a song that had been written by choir members themselves. 44 choir members sang in the concert which was attended by 366 people, including the Deputy Mayor of Westminster.



The Harrow Road Community Choir has been one of the most successful projects funded so far via the ward budget scheme. The choir has been particularly successful at developing a sense of community amongst participants. Choir members have expressed real pleasure at getting to know their neighbours and making new friends, with weekly rehearsals offering an important social aspect in addition to the musical element. Many of the participants fed this back to the project leader, with one in particular stating: "There's an amazing feeling of fellowship with a common goal to make music."

One of the conditions of the ward budget funding was that choir members would be encouraged to set up a choir committee to try to ensure the group would continue after the funding ended. A choir committee, formed of volunteers from the choir, was established in March 2010 and they have since taken on responsibilities including recruiting new members, forging further links with different community groups, finding local performance venues and organising refreshments at the weekly rehearsals. In light of the success of the project, Wigmore Hall have also committed to supporting the choir in the long term with some of their own funding.



# Statement of purpose and Westminster's guiding principles

# 5

Westminster needs to be clear why adopting its own Big Society approach is appropriate and how it will be beneficial to its residents and communities.



The council believes that the primary purpose of the decision to adopt a version of the Big Society is to release the potential of our citizens to improve shared quality of life by developing a stronger sense of community responsibility.

We see voluntarism as a better way than the state to develop and deliver many local services that had their roots in community provision, before they were effectively nationalised as the state took control of areas of service delivery.

We also believe that the council has a clear role to play as an enabler of the Big Society. One that will shift the role of the council.

Whereas before, the council would have delivered or run services on behalf of local communities, the Big Society will mean the council becomes an enabler. The council will therefore need to take a step back and instead look to use its resources to reduce bureaucracy and red tape that will in turn allow voluntary groups to grow and prosper. It will also need to use its residual expertise and knowledge to help support such schemes. It must be for the communities and neighbourhoods themselves to come together to have a greater voice in determining the services and choices available in their localities.

## Westminster's Big Society principles

In implementing the Big Society, or what in Westminster we are terming Civic Community, the council will adhere to a number of guiding principles that look to empower individuals and communities:

**01** Westminster's Civic Community policies are based on **strengthening the role of responsible citizens** who look out for each other, do the right thing, accept responsibility for their neighbourhood and use the council to help them improve society.

**02** Many of these policies will be **delivered through volunteers** giving their time and effort for free. This makes them exceptional but the council will help people deliver things that are in their own local self interest, to improve the areas in which they live and work.

**03** Westminster's Civic Community will need to be an **open and vibrant network** and the council will facilitate this and help link individuals, groups and projects together.

**04** The **council will have to change** to support these civic leaders and accommodate their projects. The council will have to **be more transparent and accountable** than it is today including with the information it holds. It will have to be more **accepting of risk, more encouraging of social action** and work on the basis that public services should be devolved to local people wherever possible.

**05** We believe that the Civic Community only works in local areas. All council services will be expected to deliver **local solutions** that are appropriate to each part of the city. The council will look at the most appropriate way to do this including delivering local services through **community-based budgets, and community-influenced commissioning**.

**06** Civic Community policies are designed to improve lives, not simply to cut spending. We recognise that a fair level of spending is essential for most services. Many civic community policies will require **initial support**. However, we believe that over time it is better for citizens as taxpayers that all services are provided in as economic a way as possible.

**07** Our goal is to see every adult as a **member of a community group** and we will create a local leadership college to train people to take on leadership roles.

**08** The **corporate sector** has a clear role to play in helping to develop the Civic Community being part of the wider community in which they operate and employing many Westminster residents and visitors. We will therefore work with them to develop our response.

**09** To deliver this programme the council promises to **champion and support good civic community work** and be open to new ideas.

**10** Civic Community policies will look to encourage and enhance **social mobility** within our communities.



# Big Society in practice



## Areas of activity

The table opposite sets out those overarching areas where the council will look to implement its response to the Big Society, in order to encourage and build civic community and empower citizens, communities and businesses.

Some are internally focussed, within the council, concentrating directly on resources that the authority controls. Others look at stimulating and assisting with external drivers and capacity required to build social capital, growing the Big Society.

Each on its own has the potential to make a difference to the delivery of services. Taken together, they represent a comprehensive approach to the Westminster Big Society.

Area	Agenda	Details
<b>The Community Service Challenge</b>	Areas where we can devolve services to communities	Westminster will undertake a fundamental review of its services and will consider the most appropriate way to deliver them in the future
<b>Sharing service delivery</b>	Areas where we can save on the back office costs of delivering services by sharing with other public agencies and involving local people	Westminster has already announced a ground-breaking scheme merging its education services with another borough. We will look to take this agenda forward identifying other opportunities
<b>Growing the market</b>	Areas where we can bring market forces to those services previously provided as a state monopoly, saving money, driving out costs and increasing real choice to our customers	To be considered as part of the council's fundamental service review
<b>Breaking down barriers</b>	A bureaucracy busting programme to identify legal and procedural barriers to delivering this programme	To include an analysis of barriers to delivering the Big Society both internally and externally
<b>Volunteering</b>	Creating and sustaining a Westminster network of volunteers – we will set the voluntary sector free by tackling needless red tape and other burdens	Including and encompassing the role of Westminster's own staff including where they themselves can help build and support civic society
<b>Westminster Futures</b>	The leadership training programme	To identify and build capacity amongst community leaders
<b>Local Choices</b>	The neighbourhood budgets programme	Taking Westminster's successful ward based budgeting scheme to the next stage in helping to boost civic society
<b>Transparency</b>	Westminster's commitment to open government means we will publish the council's own Transparency Charter	Increasing access to information held by the council helping to empower communities and individuals to make better choices

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## Implementation

Over the coming months we will roll out our response to the Big Society in the form of a Community Charter that will look to communicate a clear and comprehensive offer to individuals, communities and businesses that will detail Westminster's Big Society approach.

The Community Charter will outline how citizens can engage with the council and what they can expect in return including how we will help residents and groups become more involved in their area and how they can overcome barriers to such involvement.

We will also look at using specific measures to help us turn the Big Society into a reality such as:

- setting up a 'swap-shop' website, like Gumtree, where residents can advertise local events and initiatives, and people can list skills and activities they would like to get involved in
- providing information and 'know-how' on, for example, how to set up a street party thereby breaking down the perceived and actual barriers of excessive red tape
- focussing attention especially in those areas where people do not have as much time or resource to set up their own projects – trained community development workers could coordinate Big Society projects
- supporting community development projects provided by social enterprises in more deprived areas
- looking to provide support for the voluntary and community sector through a volunteer brokerage service

- seeking to encourage amenity societies to become more involved and work with community development workers on Big Society projects.
- encouraging participatory budgeting through the use of ward budgets, or local budgets more widely – a community meeting or local vote could be held to decide what initiatives are going to be funded
- continuing to press the Government to allow us to hold local referenda on the same day as other elections helping to increase local democratic participation
- looking to move Area Forums to focus more on Big Society initiatives including allowing residents to have a stronger role in agenda setting and an opportunity for residents to discuss particular community projects
- celebrating and marking successes to provide structure to the civic community – there will be four points across the year when we take stock and celebrate what has been achieved. In January the Civic Community Awards, in March the publication of the Annual Civic Community Report. In July participation in the national 'Big Lunch' and in October a Community Commissioning Conference.

In the long term, we will look at other measures to assist with the delivery and governance of the Big Society including:

- the possibility of a Westminster 'Civic Community Senate' of business people and community leaders to oversee this programme
- the creation of a volunteer warden's service in Westminster

- the possible creation of a network of volunteer workers to carry out home visits and advise on parenting
- the possible creation of a civic community bank and other community based finance schemes.
- development of the concept of place or community based budgets looking to place responsibility for local commissioning in the hands of communities, and linked to this;
- a redirection of ward budgets to facilitate civic community projects.

## Early Big Society initiatives

Westminster will look to implement an initial series of projects based around the principles and purpose of its approach to the Big Society as set out in this publication.

These initiatives will also fulfil the commitment made by the Leader of the Council to implement ten Big Society projects by Christmas 2010.

These early projects could include:

- the creation of an ActiveWestminster Partnership Board and ActiveWestminster Places Pledge to help boost community based health and leisure activities
- the creation of a school sports club programme
- the start of the community leadership college
- an agreement with major corporate organisations to assist in delivering Westminster's Big Society
- a commitment around Academy and Free schools

- a pilot volunteer park management scheme
- a pilot volunteer library management scheme
- a volunteer parenting support scheme
- finally, we will look to ensure that every council department is linked with a project or area in the city and will donate time to improve local life.

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## Evaluating Westminster's Big Society

Evaluating the success of this approach will in many respects be self-evident. Users will be more involved in service delivery and with their communities and we will be able to point to specific case studies of activities that could not have happened without this.

However, we can be cleverer than that. The public opinion research we have carried out over a number of years has set an involvement benchmark. The annual City Survey of 2,500 residents has shown that 41 per cent of residents currently feel they can influence decisions affecting their local area, that 16 per cent see themselves undertaking a formal volunteering role and 20 per cent feel that people not treating other people with respect and consideration is a problem.

We will therefore be able to measure the effectiveness of the Big Society in Westminster and to direct resources and capacity where appropriate.

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# Making the difference

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Westminster Council believes that the Big Society has the potential to make a real difference to our communities.

It has the potential to increase participation in the democratic process; to increase say in the future shape and delivery of local services and, ultimately, to increase the community well-being and quality of life of our neighbourhoods. All of these are reasons why Westminster should adopt its own version of the Big Society.

At the same time it has the potential to radically change the relationship, for the better, between the state and individual that puts real power in the hands of

neighbourhoods and individuals. This will mean a different role for the council; a council that exists to encourage and enable rather than simply to deliver uniform and standardised services.

Westminster is determined to meet these challenges and to deliver a Big Society that will benefit its citizens and the communities in which they live.



# Big Society: trusting relationships are key

## Christina Dykes

Senior Conservative Special Adviser, Local Government Leadership

On 20 July 2010 Philip Johnston noted in the Daily Telegraph that the first Downing Street summit on Big Society did not include a local government representative. This is in spite of the notable contribution councils are already making to realise Big Society, as Westminster City Council's experience bears witness. The absence of a local government view point in such a crucial meeting points to the lack of awareness and trust that historically Whitehall have placed on local government. It is an attitude that has to be challenged and busted if Ministers outside the Department of Communities and Local Government are to fully appreciate the importance of local government as the bridge between the wishes of central government and the trust of the people. If the Government wants to see a culture change on the scale that Big Society asks, then they will have to recognise the vital contribution of local government as a change manager.

There are therefore two challenges to a speedier realisation of Big Society. Ministers firstly will have to seek a meaningful partnership with their colleagues in local government. This will call for valuing their role, seeking their opinion and involving in greater

depth, local government representatives, in decision-making. Above all it will mean treating the sector as a responsible family member not a poor relation.

Secondly, councillors will have to re-evaluate their role. Minister's ambitions present too big an opportunity for councillors simply to be passive by-standers. Local government will not only have to convince Whitehall of the growing competence of its elected members (which can still range from the excellent to the worrying), but also demonstrate that councils and their councillors have the ability to impact behaviour change on the scale necessary for the successful transformation to Big Society.

Recently councils have been limited by Government policies to a role of dependency; delivering and policing with little scope for initiative. Under the Coalition Government's proposals, councillors' role will change to one of greater independence from government targets. The councillor will become the enabler in their community; and therefore switch from policing to being more permissive and from dictating to supporting.

## Community leadership

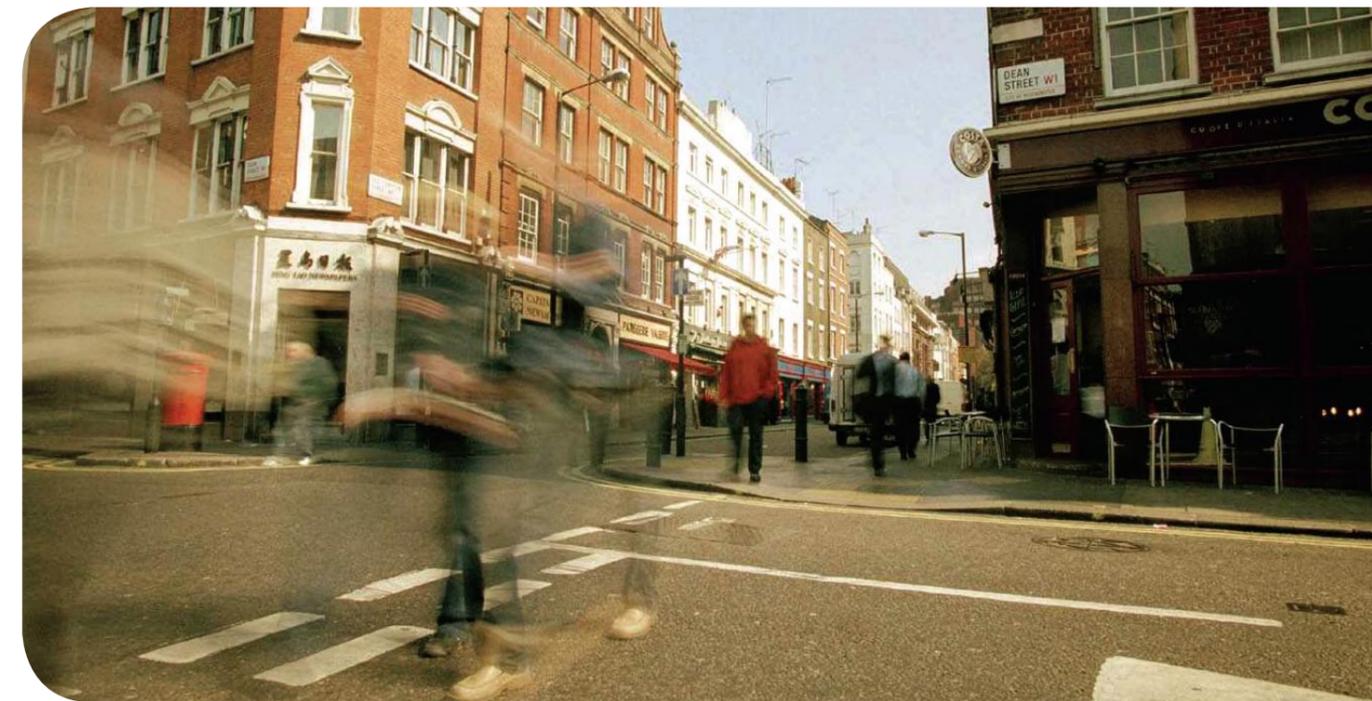
The proposed new dynamic of the public – councillor relationship must be one of equal and mutually supportive association built on a trusting partnership. Research has shown that sustainable trustworthiness has to be built (it cannot be assumed which is a commonly made mistake of politicians) and it is best built through action, evidence and visibility.

This translates into three core activities associated with building trusting relationships: community focus, community delivery and integrity of behaviours.

**Community focus** means being focussed and involved in the local community. This translates into being visible and proactive in engaging with local people and in particular 'de-mything' local governance. It means providing people with a choice of possible next steps.

**A focus on delivery** means demonstrating commitment, by evidence, of delivering and enabling the public to be part of the process. It means being available to constituents but also responding promptly to calls/correspondence, feeding back promptly and showing persistence on behalf of constituents when things need to be done as well as being personally involved by visiting and taking an interest.

**Integrity** rests on honesty, transparency and taking responsibility for actions; being clear about what can be achieved and what cannot and for councillors being true to what they promise and say.



To realise good community leadership councillors should be aware of the following behaviours:

## 01 Good communications

Being able to work with a variety of different interest groups at their pace; being able to adapt style in accordance with the needs of the group, being able to effectively facilitate meetings; and give appropriate feedback. Importantly this must include a shift from communicating to people, **to** conversations **with** them.

## 02 Openness

Being visible and transparent in your actions; being approachable and open minded.

## 03 Empathetic

Listening and hearing about services from a users' perspective and being receptive and responsive.

If a new type of relationship is built between both central government and local government and government and the governed, then maybe Whitehall can be convinced there could be less need for National Centres of Community Organising to train community organisers and encourage community groups. Why introduce an additional layer of activity when there are people already there – our elected members

## 04 Negotiating

'Holding the space' i.e. being able to facilitate a respected resolution to conflicting demands; resolving and reconciling different agendas; mediating between different groups; managing conflict and differences in aspirations and ideas.

## 05 Motivating

Encouraging; stimulating and confidence building especially when times get tough.

## 06 Managing expectations

Delivering and being able to ensure realistic expectations are set, and communicating them.

## 07 Sharing

Learning to let go and work with between different agencies and organisations from all sectors

– on the ground who could serve the role? We should look first to encouraging and supporting the role of local councillors. They have an unrivalled and balanced knowledge of their locality and there is the added safeguard that they are democratically accountable to the communities they serve. They are therefore best placed to enable and to stimulate local communities to successfully participate in the Big Society concept.

# Appendix: future Westminster Civic Community proposals

Sports, leisure and physical activity opportunities are already delivered through a Big Society of voluntary, public, private and charitable organisations. The council's ActiveWestminster strategy and the work of the ActiveWestminster Partnership has improved the co-ordination and developed this 'mixed economy' of providers to ensure those living, working and visiting the City have the best opportunity to participate and progress in sport and physical activity. As a commissioning council the remaining services that have not already been contracted out will be outsourced to provide the best delivery and development options to meet community needs.

In order to provide a catalyst to further develop a 'City of Sport' built around a Big Society of providers and neighbourhood opportunities, we will be creating an **ActiveWestminster Partnership Board** which will consist of lead representatives from key public, private and voluntary organisations. This Board will be instrumental in the effective promotion, development and delivery of the ActiveWestminster strategy as well as maximising the use of collective resources to best effect, including maximising grant and sponsorship partnership funding.

As part of the work of the ActiveWestminster Board and the Partnership group, a number of key initiatives will be delivered to ensure that the providers of sport and physical activity opportunities have the right support **to enable sustainable, high quality delivery** which engages the whole community.



## School Sports Clubs

The work of the council's School Sports Partnership Team has focused on increasing participation and competitive opportunities in school sport which has resulted in a significant improvement, with over 94 per cent of Westminster pupils taking part in two hours of activity each week (up from 55 per cent in 2005/06).

The next phase will focus on increasing participation outside of the school day with an aim of achieving five hours participation each week. These outcomes will support school education attainment, personal development and make inroads into community health inequalities and growing obesity concerns in young people.

To support this aim, a new programme to develop a range of sustainable school sports clubs will be launched to promote sport and physical activity and 'extended schools' opportunities after school hours. The programme will focus on utilising local sports clubs/ providers and parent volunteers to develop activity after and before school time and to 'signpost' to other suitable local opportunities.

It is anticipated that this new programmes will support the achievement of 75 per cent of schools to achieve three hours of participation in sport and physical activity by 2012 (from 51 per cent at present).



## The ActivePlaces Pledge

The ActivePlaces pledge recognises sports and leisure facilities that provide two hours free community use each week and is particularly targeted at the private sector in making additional free access to community groups within facilities that have traditionally had restrictive access to such community based opportunities.

The two hours of free provision could be for a specific group (eg a sports club or community group), a school, local talented athlete or for targeted 'causal use' activities. The free access will be agreed with the participating facility to ensure it is appropriate for the activity and also meets the needs of the local community. The two hours can be provided each week or over a concentrated period of time (eg off-season periods).

Participating facilities benefit from on site publicity and City Wide publicity, word of mouth from community participants and direct promotion to suitable



community groups and individuals. Participation in the programme will also provide an excellent Corporate Social Responsibility opportunity.

Community groups, individuals and/or clubs benefit from sustainable facility provision which would significantly assist in raising participation levels in sport and physical activity, particularly from 'low participation' groups.

It is anticipated that 20 facilities will be engaged in the ActivePlaces pledge programme by 2012 which will provide over 2000 free hours of access to sport and leisure opportunities each year.

By 2012 when the Olympic and Paralympics Games are hosted in London, Westminster will indeed be a City of Sport and be in a position to deliver a timely and active legacy for local communities to enjoy for years to come.

