

OUR BIG SOCIETY:

voluntary work and community
action in the East Midlands

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Big Society and the VCS

Autumn 2010

Context

This paper is first in a series considering the role that voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations play in delivering Big Society and its principles. This paper analyses the over-arching role that binds all VCS organisations. Future papers in this series examine the additionality brought to the Big Society by VCS organisations working across an array of themes and specialist activities. This series aims to inform and support government thinking around the future of social activity and social policy and how that thinking must be embedded across all areas of policy development in order to gain maximum value from the Big Society approach. We have endeavoured to capture a 'picture' of the VCS offer to society as a whole and explain the way in which the sector flows and interacts, in consideration of the opportunities and challenges for moving forward in partnership with Government.

East Midlands Dimension

The 2010 UK Civil Society Almanac, produced by ncvo, identified 11,617 registered voluntary sector organisations in the East Midlands in 2007/8. These organisations have a collective turnover of over £1.2bn and manage assets in excess of £2.3bn. However, the number of registered organisations are minimal compared to the many unregistered and immeasurable local community and voluntary groups currently estimated to number somewhere between 19,000 and 25,000.

The East Midlands VCS works across a wide range of thematic areas including community development, volunteering, advice and guidance, sector support and capacity building, criminal justice, health and social care, education and training, environment and all aspects of equalities and human rights issues. VCS groups meet at regional level across each of these themes, drawing on local networks where they exist, to share expertise, deliver joint projects and services, raise coordinated voice and to align with other specialist networks on issues of common interest.

The regional network One East Midlands facilitates much of this inter-organisational dialogue, informs and engages the VCS in shaping policy at local through to national level and supports the VCS to adapt to the changing political environment. One East Midlands works closely with and through local support and development organisations and has an estimated reach of 30,362.

Leading the strategic development of the VCS in the East Midlands are two principle support networks, both of which are supported by One East Midlands:

East Midlands Infrastructure Steering Group

Brings together local support providers to share experiences, campaign effectively on issues pertinent to the whole region, shape relationships with elected members and public sector bodies and promote the benefits and strengths of VCS support services. Its membership includes CVS, rural community councils, local learning and skills networks and specialist equality bodies e.g. disability support.

Regional Infrastructure Consortium

Draws together the specialist 'wider third sector' service providers who operate at a level between local and national for reach, sustainability and efficiency purposes. Their work coordinates specialist input on policy issues and membership includes those working in the fields of equalities, asset development, rural communities, European funding, learning and skills, and social enterprise.

Challenges and opportunities

Size and complexity

The sheer diversity of interests, structures, geographical spread and reach across the VCS makes engagement complex. Indeed, the size of the VCS itself has led to competition and conflict within the sector as groups compete for resources to meet the needs of their particular beneficiaries. However, competition is an opportunity to improve quality, reach and overall standards of support on offer – particularly for delivery of services which are of interest to public sector organisations.

Diversity also brings a wide range of expertise and skills which can be harnessed and used to improve public service delivery.

Managing the issues of diversity, complexity and competition requires technical understanding of the VCS and an ability to both provide leadership and support independence simultaneously. Above all else this is the role of VCS infrastructure; to nurture. VCS infrastructure is not consistently high in quality and still needs development itself but where it works well it must be prized and valued for its skill, knowledge and unique positioning.

Equality of engagement

Maslow's Hierarchy of Need, published as part of the 'Theory of Human Motivation' in 1943 has endured to this day as a clear representation of how inability to achieve the basic requirements of life then become a physical, emotional and psychological barrier to self-actualisation – to become 'all that we can be'.

Big Society is predicated on the principle that people will be sufficiently able and motivated to engage actively and fully in their communities and in society as a whole. However, all evidence shows that any distance of an individual from meeting their personal needs directly impacts on their ability to engage and participate. Isolation, poverty, physical and emotional barriers, lack of social capital and low esteem all prevent self actualisation and are barriers to achieving the Big Society. Principles of Equal Opportunity dictate that those least able to participate should be supported to engage on a level playing field. We examine this issue through individual experiences in later papers in this series.

Economic impact

The VCS is a powerful driver of the local and national economy as an employer, deliverer of services and developer of skills, education and experience. The VCS supports people through difficult times, enabling them to reintegrate into society, return to good health and play an economic role. This preventative role is difficult to measure but has direct economic value to the local and national economy.

Value and reach

The VCS is innovative and flexible and therefore is often quicker to respond to local need than statutory service providers who can be restricted by bureaucracy. This flexibility makes the VCS a useful service delivery mechanism for the public sector but must not be at the expense of the sectors primary role as advocate. It is vital that contracts for the delivery of public services by the VCS do not inhibit or restrict our ability to communicate the changing needs of our beneficiaries.

In many cases, however, the VCS understanding of communities makes the sector a prime provider. The VCS is not free but offers exceptional value for money. For a modest investment the VCS delivers support and services to those furthest from mainstream provision and preventative approaches that reduce the need for future intervention.

Volunteering

Big Society relies heavily on personal commitment and dedication to a common cause. In reality, volunteers give their time and resources for many different reasons, which may or may not be completely in tune with the general aim. Volunteers must be kept engaged with any project, but that engagement is not infinite and may be terminated unilaterally for many different, unpredictable reasons. In short, volunteers self-select; they cannot be made or retained to order. This makes the application of volunteers in the delivery of services to the vulnerable difficult.

Volunteering is not free. Volunteers have exactly the same support needs as any paid employee. They require support, induction, training, supervision and opportunities to grow and develop in their role. The costs of volunteer management can be directly compared with the cost of any other employment simply without the salary, pension and National Insurance costs associated.

Volunteering is not equally spread across society; some sectors of society clearly find it easier to volunteer than others. The Compact has calculated the average cost of successfully recruiting and supporting a volunteer from the harder to reach sectors of society at £2,000 per person but saves much more than this through social inclusion, engagement and reduced need for public service intervention. Loss of funding for volunteering and volunteer support will have a direct negative impact on the UK economy.

At Risk

Reducing national debt is clearly in the interests of everyone in the UK. However, the reduction in public spending budgets is already having a disproportionate effect on local VCS funding and contracts. We welcome the statements made by David Cameron and senior ministers, asking local public sector to think before cutting VCS support. In reality the picture is concerning and unless swift and decisive action is taken there will be little of what we recognise and value in the VCS remaining to support delivery of a Big Society future.

Impact of National Policy

Throughout this series we will look at the existing national policy which frames the space in which many VCS organisations work. In each policy area we have considered two questions:

1. Does this policy entirely or in-part support Big Society principles?
2. How would the policy need to change in order to support and enable Big Society approaches better?

Our analysis of Big Society in relation to the VCS has been undertaken in a relatively short time frame, reflecting the current pace of policy change. We take this opportunity to strongly urge Government to embed the approach that we have used across departments to ensure that Big Society becomes the reality and success that it promises.

Rachel Quinn, Chief Executive, One East Midlands

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Children, Young People & Families and the Big Society

Context

A primary element of Big Society thinking has been the encouragement of citizens to take a more active role in their communities. Within this strand is the proposal to develop a National Citizens Service, targeted at young people (16 year olds) to develop a culture and ethos of community participation within our young people.

This document considers the role that the VCS currently plays in supporting and encouraging active participation of children, young people and their families (CYP&F) in their communities and some of the challenges facing young people in engaging with the Big Society approach.

Case study

Derbyshire VCI Passport



The Derbyshire VCI (voluntary, community and independent sector) Passport is a volunteer development programme designed to equip volunteers from 16yrs+ with the knowledge and skills to enable them to work safely and effectively with children and young people in their communities.

The project is a partnership between Derbyshire County Council, the district councils, volunteer centres, volunteers and many volunteer engaging organisations such as cadets, Homestart and the Youth Offending Team.

Volunteers attend a structured training programme covering 5 modules:

1. Health & Safety
2. Equal Opportunities
3. Safeguarding
4. First Aid
5. Involving and consulting young people

At the end of the programme volunteers develop an action plan for implementation in their own communities which they present to their local Parish Council for future support. In addition they receive a CRB check and are presented with the VCI Passport, which is valid for 3 years and is recognised by partners as a quality assurance allowing them to work with young and vulnerable people.

The project targets development of young volunteers with qualifications below level 2 and is accredited by OCN. In addition to skills development, evaluation of the project has also evidenced growth in confidence building, team work, safeguarding and practical activity to support community development and cohesion as a result of the programme. To date 20 of the 200 participants have also secured work as a result of the project.

Derbyshire VCI Passport is jointly funded by Derbyshire County Council, district authority contributions and additional resource from the volunteer centres. Delivery of the project costs between £75 and £100 per participant.

For more information contact Matt Ford, VCI Co-ordinator on 01773 744741 or email matt.ford@derbyshire.gov.uk

East Midlands Dimension

The 2001 census shows a total East Midlands population of 4.3m and is expected to rise to 4.8m by 2028 making the East Midlands the fastest growing population outside the South of England. However, population growth has concentrated in rural and suburban areas with the primary cities of Nottingham, Leicester and Derby seeing population decline. As the third most rural region there has been an acceleration of ageing in the population as a whole which has led to the closure of schools and services, particularly across the rural parts of the region.

Child poverty in the East Midlands remains roughly in line with national averages at 18.4% (2008). However, the proportion of children in poverty living in 'in-work' families has grown; reflecting the economic climate of low skill, low pay in the East Midlands. The hardship of recession is likely to further increase poverty across the region, but children can't wait.

There are an estimated 10,000 VCS groups working on CYP&F issues across the East Midlands. These groups coordinate regionally through the VCS Engage network supported by Children's Links with three broad outcomes:-

- Increased engagement of the VCS: promoting partnerships and networks across and between the VCS and other sectors, extending network support to an increasing number of diverse groups.
- Increased representation and influence: strengthening the voice of the sector in the region and achieving policy change at local and regional level.
- Building VCS capacity: increasing the range and quality of children and young people VCS services regionally and locally.

VCS Engage East Midlands brokers the relationship between VCS groups working in the field of CYP&F with local and regional stakeholders who need to engage with the VCS for successful service delivery and integration. This diverse membership enables opportunity for local, regional and national networking and influence. Nationally the programme, through its parent funder Children England, works closely with DfE and policy development.

A focus group held in November 2010 identified the following as key elements to a 'Big Society' future for children, young people and families:

- **young people play an active role in taking responsibility for their communities and for each other**
- **young people have access to the services that support them to grow and develop**
- **good practice in involving young people in service design and decision making is common place**
- **those young people who are seldom heard are supported to engage**
- **families have access to living wages**
- **training and education builds opportunity and aspiration**
- **young people are safe**

True engagement of young people in Big Society will depend upon speed and flexibility in the system. Localisation and community influence over local decision making is a valuable element of the Big Society and one which will be likely to lead to tangible improvements in service design and local outcomes. However, if the process of community engagement is long and bureaucratic then changes will be slow to appear and communities will fast lose interest. For young people, who grow and develop quickly, this issue is highly pertinent. Rapid needs assessments followed by a swift response must be achieved if our young people are to feel part of shaping and developing our communities.

Big Society must be for all young people, not just those most able to engage. Much VCS activity with young people focuses on supporting those most vulnerable, disadvantaged or at risk in society. Big Society must embrace and engage all young people to be successful but some young people will require support. The Youth Parliament has been effective in raising the concept of the need to engage and ‘hear’ the views of young people. However, in practice it is a ‘top-down’ model which distills young people down to the most informed, able and articulate in performing a representational role. New ways of engaging young people, building on the supportive expertise of VCS groups, must be developed.

Big Society is already in action. There are many VCS examples of intergenerational activity, young volunteering programmes, peer mentoring by young people and work which supports voice from those young people who are seldom heard. The VCS is excellent at providing a vehicle for the flexibility and innovation demanded by young people. The scale of local activity with young people also supports other parts of the community through the use of community amenities an engagement in sport and cultural heritage activities. If it is working now at local level, don’t fix it.

Recipe for success

For Big Society to succeed for young people we must collectively build a relationship between communities, the VCS and the public and private sectors which embeds the core principles of:

- **Safeguarding**
- **Participation and engagement of young people**
- **Addressing inequality and celebrating diversity**

Impact of National Policy

The principle policy driver for work with CYP&F is the **Childrens Act 2004** which crystallised the approaches embedded within **Every Child Matters** and led to creation of local partnerships and safeguarding boards and the production of local children and young people’s plans. The principle being to work in partnership, both statutory and non statutory to improve outcomes for CYP&F. Policy in this area is focused on the primary aim of safeguarding young people and developing their wellbeing. Whilst there is acceptance that safeguarding processes can be extremely inhibiting to community activity with young people, any reduction in bureaucracy relating to safeguarding (e.g. removal of vetting and barring scheme) must be undertaken carefully.

The **2008 Duty to Involve** requires public bodies to undertake meaningful engagement with communities on issues which impact on them. To date the Duty to Involve has been subject to many and varied interpretations at local level and has not given sufficient weight to the voice of young people in contributing to service delivery. The **2010 Equalities Act** makes ‘age’ one of the ‘protected categories’ in law, so that no-one may be discriminated against because of their age. The Act could be used constructively alongside the Duty to Involve and the **Compact** to ensure that the voices of young people are embedded in local decision making.

There is substantial information about the variable success of mainstream education in meeting the needs of minority groups, for example the consistent underperformance of male African Caribbeans when compared to white or Asian males from the same age group. **Free Schools** bring an opportunity to create a learning environment more appropriate for these young people to thrive. However it is unrealistic to assume that communities with endemic underperformance will have capacity to develop Free Schools without support and capacity building. This has been demonstrated by the first wave of approved Free Schools which have not seen good representation from disadvantaged groups but have been taken up by communities with lower disadvantage and greater capacity. Unless addressed this is likely to increase inequality in education rather than decrease it.

The **Extended Schools** programme has been highly successful at a local level in maximising the use of services which support young people and families and create an environment which will support working families. Extended Schools are seen by the VCS as supporting local partnerships and enabling the Big Society. Continued investment in Extended Schools provision will deliver Big Society objectives.

The incorporation of emotional wellbeing and community engagement within the **OFSTED Framework** has been an effective driver in building links between schools and the community. The framework approach was supported by the findings of the **2010 Marmot Review** which concluded that health and wellbeing is driven by relative socioeconomic status. To increase wellbeing we must work collectively towards achieving:

- an enabling society that maximises individual and community potential.
- social justice, health and sustainability at the heart of all policies.

The **Child Poverty Act 2010** provides a primary focus to eradicate poverty by 2020. The statutory duty for local authorities to publish their Child Poverty Strategy by March 2011 is an opportunity to ensure that an approach based purely on income is not used and to focus instead on the kind of society we want. VCS and community engagement in the development of Child Poverty Strategies allow for the consideration of wider society's issues and will ensure that Big Society is effective and poverty eliminated. Recent pilots (Rights – Respecting schools - Unicef) demonstrated societies in miniature, showing us that where there were profound values and respect for one another, improved outcomes such as community cohesion and sense of duty were paramount.

3

Commissioning and the Big Society

Context

The anticipated increase in civil society involvement in the delivery of public services is received with mixed feelings by VCS organisations. There is an expectation that public bodies will commission more services from the VCS and others in the future. By doing so this will create opportunity for the VCS and communities to share their knowledge and expertise and shape better services to meet **real** need.

Strategic commissioning frameworks which value and enable the contribution of the VCS have developed over recent years at local level. However, these are not consistent across the country and lead to wide variation in the quality of relationships.

Case study

Boston Bank

The aim of the Boston Bank project is to resurrect Lincolnshire's first ever private bank, using the historic building as a community centre, including business incubation units for social enterprises.

Over £1.5million has been secured so far for the repairs and refurbishment of the venue, which will bring economic and social benefits to local communities, with potential investments hopefully increasing the fund to £2million.

Following discussions with Social Enterprise East Midlands & UK Business Incubation, the project will also provide low cost and highly adaptable space to suit the markets and needs of start-up businesses.

The project will complement the work of key strategic and delivery partners, including Lincolnshire Waterways Partnership and Taylor ITEX Ltd, bringing a diverse range of health services and social enterprise together to stimulate demand and exploit local procurement opportunities.

East Midlands Dimension

There are an estimated 35,000 VCS organisations in the East Midlands. These organisations vary in size from small community based groups with few or no paid staff to big organisations with 50 or more employees. Total turnover of registered VCS groups (charities and social businesses) is £1.2bn according to the 2010 Civil Society Almanac (NCVO). Nationally trends show that 36% of total sector income is from statutory sources. At a regional level this would equate to £432m of which approximately £300m is earned through delivery of contracted services.

Challenges and opportunities

The VCS makes a significant contribution to the aims of the Big Society, by improving outcomes for local people and communities. VCS organisations have a long experience of working in partnerships with the public sector through both grant aided and contracted work. However, some organisations due to their size and capacity may face challenges that make being involved in the commissioning process particularly difficult. Small steps to reduce red tape could rapidly improve community engagement and service effectiveness, efficiency and reach and ensure better outcomes are achieved.

Barriers of bureaucracy: There is a need for proportionality in procurement processes depending on the size and scope of the service and contract. A more consistent procurement process, simplified and streamlined, will allow small groups to participate without being overwhelmed by red tape. The VCS welcomes the government's pledge to remove unnecessary red tape and enable organisations delivering public services to develop sustainability by generating a surplus.

A current role of VCS infrastructure organisations is to support small and frontline VCS groups to understand and engage with often complex commissioning and procurement processes. It is important to maintain the accumulated skills, knowledge and experience of these organisations and their relationships with frontline groups. There is a danger of losing these structures and knowledge because spending and budget cuts have taken effect before alternative means of funding have been established.

The principles of community action and ownership articulated within Big Society have enormous potential to create opportunities for greater involvement of users in the design and delivery of services. Involving local people in public service delivery has been shown to improve service delivery outcomes, resulting in services which are more relevant to people's needs leading to increased take-up and delivery of better and more sustainable public services.

To sustain a vibrant and diverse VCS there is merit in the provision of a mixture of both grants and contracts from statutory sources. Whilst some VCS groups are able to deliver contracted services, many will require minimal support and deliver high levels of return from short term seed-corn investment. The provision of a small grants programme is a valid commissioning outcome in the successful delivery of a thriving voluntary sector in any given locality.

Impact of National Policy

The recent drive to improve effectiveness, reach and quality of health services and reduce health inequality has precipitated a move to a commissioning based model of health and social care provision. The health white paper Equity and excellence; liberating the NHS (2010) builds on this approach through the concept of local GP Consortia which will replace Primary Care Trusts and Strategic Health Authorities as the principle health commissioning bodies. At local level, VCS groups are ideally placed to both inform and shape local health commissioning priorities and deliver services to those most excluded from mainstream health provision. GP consortia must be encouraged to work both strategically and practically with the VCS to best meet local need.

The development of an effective national **Welfare to Work** programme will rely on the commissioning of support services which are appropriate and address specific local need alongside culturally embedded worklessness. In the implementation of welfare reform, as with many other new policy initiatives, the VCS is well placed to play a three-fold role:

1. To shape and inform commissioning priorities based on direct linkage with communities and thorough understanding of community need
2. To deliver services which are particular to the needs of previously excluded communities and individuals
3. To enable long term transformation within communities; challenging cultural barriers and stereotypes.

4

Environment and the Big Society

Context

The devolution and decentralisation of power from central government to the local public sector and communities; features strongly in current government thinking. The Big Society offers to enable communities to take responsibility for their lives; with emphasis on local services by and for local people. However, environmental concerns rarely respect local boundaries. New policy developments leaning heavily on the localism agenda face a challenge addressing environmental issues that may require regional, national and potentially international collaboration. However, at the heart of environmental sustainability lies the actions and behaviour of people and communities.

Environmental organisations perform a dual role of both influencer and deliverer and take a two-pronged approach in addressing this:

- engaging communities in activities to improve environmental sustainability and
- embedding sustainability principles within the development of local policies and strategies.

Case study

Friends of Green Wood Community Forum

Based in Nottinghamshire, Greenwood Community Forest has always encouraged community participation through its establishment of Friends groups to improve, care for and promote the community woodland sites being created.

Created in 2000, the Friends of Greenwood Community Forum offers a place for these individual groups to share their experience and knowledge, whilst providing mutual support, boosting confidence and increasing recognition of the work of individual volunteers.

The forum is led by the Friends groups, with support by the Greenwood team. Their other activities include quarterly meetings, an annual awards celebration, production of The Greenwood Community Woodland Handbook and the attainment of Green Flag status for individual sites.

“Over ten years, one thing that has stood out for me is the camaraderie, depth of knowledge, range of skills and bucketfuls of advice we are happy to share with each other. I think that is the main reason we are all still involved and long may it continue.” *Colin Barson, Chair of the Friends of Greenwood Community Forum*

For more information visit www.greenwoodforest.org.uk



East Midlands Dimension

The environmental VCS have consistently been at the forefront of delivering projects and activities that promote good practice in the use of natural and environmental resources and engaging communities in activities that have a positive impact on the environment.

In the East Midlands there are many groups working in an environmental context, coming together within the informal network of East Midlands Environment Link (EMEL). Collectively they coordinate their activities and increase impact through sharing skills and resources, resulting in an holistic approach to addressing environmental issues.

Total membership of EMEL members exceeds 450,000 in the East Midlands. The network collectively supports a large network of volunteers and owns and manages thousands of hectares of environmentally significant land in the interest of people and wildlife.

EMEL have consistently worked with the public sector to ensure that VCS perspectives on the environment are represented within local and regional policy. It is important that policies that link national and local principles and objectives on the environment preserve and foster and build on this legacy.

Challenges and opportunities

Environmental VCS groups have a long and successful history of establishing local volunteer structures for local initiatives. Knowledge of the local area, a commitment to its protection and a pride in the natural environment all contribute to this success and support its continuity. As member-based groups, environmental VCS organisations are heavily reliant on volunteer effort and contribution. However, the challenge to all such organisations is to keep volunteers committed and engaged, otherwise momentum is lost.

Involving local people in environmental activities fosters a willingness to care more about their local area and assume a greater responsibility for their part in that community. This can bring positive outcomes when people contribute their time and resources to achieve locally identified needs and objectives. Continuity of this work can be enhanced by more progressive policies that encourage:

- Volunteer recruitment and giving,
- Group development coupled with legal and professional support.

These issues resonate with the Big Society idea.

Environmental VCS organisations have developed productive relationships with a range of current and former public sector structures, finding ways to reflect environmental principles in policy-making for the benefit of all society. This has been particularly successful in embedding the economic argument of following sound environmental principles in local decision making processes and sustainable development practices in regional and local transport plans.

However public sector at the local level must be persuaded of the importance of continuing this relationship and preserving its legacy. There is a real danger that otherwise, funding pressures will mean that local authorities take not simply a local but a “parochial” attitude which would work against the essentially national impact of environmental concerns.

Whilst focused action relating to community engagement with environmental issues can be coordinated at a local scale, dealing with the wider impacts frequently requires a scale greater than local. An example is work being undertaken to support biodiversity and water quality within river basins. Rivers do not adhere to political or neighbourhood boundaries and acting to improve rivers has to be taken on

a scale between local and national. Similar considerations have to be considered for issues such as air quality, transport planning, forestry and animal migration patterns.

Impact of National Policy

The coalition government has launched the **National Citizen Service** pilots aimed at school leavers aged 16 to take place from summer 2011. This could provide an opportunity for young people to engage in social action projects and take part in environmental stewardship roles in their communities.

The **Localism Bill**, which is still to be publicised, will devolve power away from the centre empowering people and organisations to challenge the way local services are being delivered and to offer a better more cost effective alternative. Communities and organisations will be able to bid to takeover the running of community amenities such as parks, museums, road networks and pathways. Professional and legal advice will be essential in helping communities to exercise their rights and obligations in a sustainable way.

In spring 2011 DEFRA are due to publish the **Natural Environment White Paper**. Effective dialogue with environmental VCS organisations and networks will help to frame the role that the environmental VCS can play in supporting both community engagement in the environment and in influencing and shaping good practice at local, regional and national level.

The development of **Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs)** across the country is one of the few new structures to reflect a wider geographical coverage. The focus on economy and enterprise will have direct implications for the development of transport planning and land use. To ensure wider sustainability within actions arising from the LEPs, engagement with environmental VCS organisations and embedding principles of sustainable development at the outset will deliver tangible economic benefit as well as contribute to national carbon reduction, resource efficiency and other sustainability targets.

It is important that issues of uncertainty as a result of new government policy and initiatives are urgently resolved. So many environmental issues, such as biodiversity loss and climate change, are time-critical. Delay in dealing with them will have a damaging impact at both a local and national level.

It is vital that the coalition government is able to support and enforce the national and regional strategies and associated action plans in order to conserve and protect the environment. There is a risk that regional and national issues may be neglected as government pursues the localism agenda as the cornerstone for building the Big Society. Of prime importance is the recognition that environmental issues such as sustainable development and biodiversity are essential to the health and prosperity of society at the local and national level. This recognition must be established throughout public sector policy; linking neighbourhoods, regions and sometimes the international community in positive action for positive outcomes.

5

Faith and the Big Society

Context

In 2001, four out of every five respondents to the Home Office Citizenship Survey reported having some kind of affiliation to a faith community. So it is not surprising to find Communities Minister Andrew Stunell stressing that faith-based community action is a key part of the vision for the Big Society. In a recent address to the Faith-Based Regeneration Network [FbRN], he spoke of how faith-based organisations are well-rooted in communities and have a long track record of successful work to address social needs. He noted that they are also able to stimulate volunteering, and draw on their own financial resources. ¹

¹ Keynote speech at the Faith Based Regeneration Network national conference in London on 19 October by Andrew Stunell Communities Minister

Case study

Malt Cross

The Malt Cross is a Christian project located in a Victorian music hall in the heart of Nottingham, containing a cafe bar, modern gallery space for art, craft and other creative events, a prayer room and space that can be used for outreach into the city centre.

Through £1.97m in grants from various sources, including the National Lottery and Arts Council, the building was acquired by the Malt Cross Music Hall Trust Company in 1997, with the objective of restoring and preserving the building for the city.

The Trust aims to reach out in practical and appropriate ways with God's love, responding to the needs of people in their 20s and 30s who use the city at night, whilst encouraging safe and responsible drinking, and building community and long term relationships with people.

Other projects run or facilitated by the Trust include investment in young and local talent and emerging artists, Street Pastors, Safe Space, Clubs Outreach, Café Theologic and CAP money management.

For more information visit www.maltcross.com



East Midlands Dimension

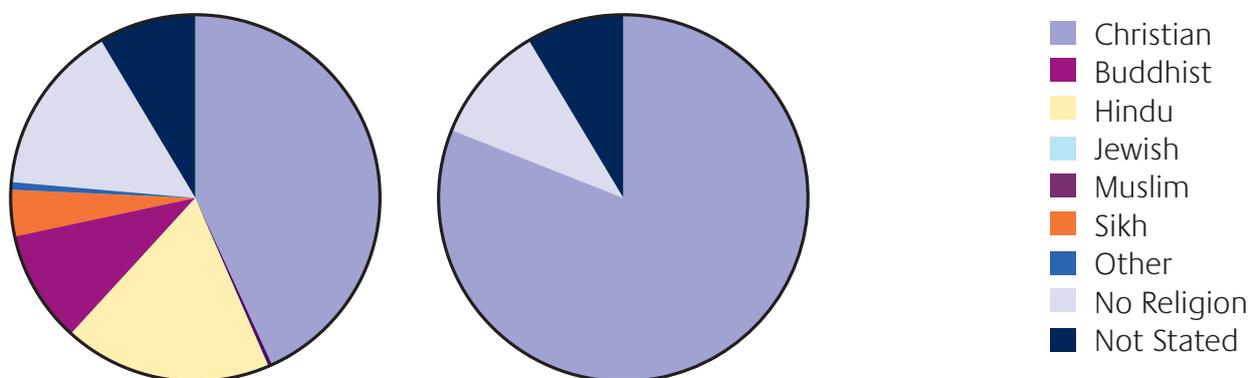
The 2001 Census shows 72% of the people in the East Midlands region think of themselves as Christian with 1.6% identifying as Hindu, and 1.7% as Muslim.

Christian	72.0%	Sikh	0.8%
Buddhist	0.2%	Other	0.2%
Hindu	1.6%	No religion	15.9%
Jewish	0.1%	Religion not stated	7.5%
Muslim	1.7%		

These figures however look rather different when viewed from a Local Authority perspective. For example:

Leicester City

Lincolnshire City



In Leicester, when compared within the rankings for England and Wales, the level of Christian affiliation drops to 44.7%. This shows Leicester to have almost the smallest population of Christian affiliation with only Tower Hamlets having a smaller Christian faith group. Hindu affiliation increases to 14.7% (3rd in England and Wales after Harrow and Brent Local Authorities) and Muslim affiliation to 11% (17th in England & Wales).

The East Midlands faith communities are supported by two regional infrastructure networks. The **East Midlands Churches Forum** supports the Churches' engagement with local government and other agencies, identifies issues of concern and opportunities for action, and works to develop dialogue and partnership between churches, church-based voluntary and community organisations, and the public sector at every level. It tries to ensure that the agendas of these organisations include and respect Christian values, the quality of life, and the views of those who would otherwise not have a voice.

The **Faiths Forum for the East Midlands (FFEM)** is the regional hub for dialogue and co-operation between people with different religious beliefs and worldviews who share a commitment to good citizenship and building a society where we can all feel at home, where there is respect for difference and where diversity is valued. The Christian churches have national, regional and local structures, and most are able to appoint professional ministers, so that they are better placed to bridge to other organisations and link to public authorities than the minority faith communities, which depend very much on the voluntary efforts of their members, and may not have regional and national structures and networks to support them.

Challenges and opportunities

Faith communities have a strong tradition of advocacy and support for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people in our society. Their immediate response to questions around the Big Society was to highlight the potential impact on these socially excluded and marginalised groups. Their concerns and also the possibilities they recognise are echoed by every area of the VCS and are discussed in more detail elsewhere.

People may participate in a faith community by believing, by belonging and by rolling up their sleeves. Communities of faith may be rooted in a particular neighbourhood, or ‘gathered’ from a wide area. The congregation of a village church is likely to be local, and its social and community activities will be directed by and responsive to the needs and traditions of the village; the congregation of a large urban mosque may be largely drawn from the surrounding neighbourhoods, and its social and community activities will be directed by and responsive to a very different set of needs and traditions; the ‘gathered’ community of a Jain temple may travel from across the region, or even further, and the focus of their activities may be different again.

Faith communities come together on a basis of shared beliefs, shared traditions and trust. They are a source of strength and resilience to their members, particularly in unfamiliar places and challenging situations. People may turn to their faith community for help, advice, friendship, support and security, and within the community people will strive to meet one another’s needs, often with very limited resources.

The churches, and in recent years other faith communities as well, may open their doors and extend their services to anyone in need in their neighbourhood. They may have resources to share: premises with kitchens and toilets, sometimes transport (minibuses), office equipment – a photocopier for example, one or more dedicated professionals, and a commitment to service to their neighbours. Faith organisations may be a source of social capital, of finance, of volunteers and of goodwill, upon which the wider voluntary and community sector can draw. In a sector with dwindling resources, faith-based organisations may be in a position of strength.

The Big Society is a vision not a plan. Faith (and other) communities of place or interest can help to define the Big Society, offer innovative ideas, tell local government what the felt needs of the neighbourhood are, which interventions and community services are making a difference, and work to determine how local needs can best be met. Faith-based organisations may be able to lead on bids to provide services, help raise funds to buy valued resources on behalf of the community, or act as advocates for local people in challenging inappropriate bureaucratic decisions. All this will depend on partnerships and networks, because faith groups are often small, and like other VCS organisations, have to take care not to bite off more than they can chew.

Faith communities are resilient. Where there is a need, people of faith have traditionally found a response and will continue to do so – they are already the Big Society in action. Historically the churches have provided health and social care, homelessness and education services, and more recently have been working in partnership with the welfare state, offering exceptional value added services through a committed volunteer base. In an increasingly multi-religious and multi-cultural society where the pressure to deliver more for less is ever stronger, the challenge is seeking ways for all faith communities to co-operate and do what is needed, and not feel overwhelmed by expectations. It is important that faith communities do not turn inward, and withdraw from social engagement, just as the needs increase.

Impact of National Policy

Church Action on Poverty and similar groups are campaigning against recent **Welfare Reform** announcements and faith leaders are speaking out against *'The stigmatising effect these announcements have had on the poorest and most vulnerable in society'*. The welfare reform will certainly place a great deal of pressure on the provision of support to vulnerable people, and increase the need for such support, but will leave little in the way of resources to provide it. Faith organisations may be well placed to provide an informed view on the impact of welfare reform.

The **2010 Equalities Act** makes religion or belief one of the 'protected categories' in law, so that no-one may be discriminated against because of what he or she believes, or does not believe, because of the religion he or she professes, or does not profess. The Act is intended to help us live together peacefully in a multi-faith and multi-cultural society, and to cope with both the need for fairness and the fact of diversity. For both religious people and others it poses a challenge to our capacity to respect and value the other.

The **Localism Bill** now before parliament, which sets out the new rights that will underpin the Big Society – the right to buy, the right to bid, and the right to challenge - may bring significant opportunities for faith communities to take a lead in developing the neighbourhood where they find themselves, and to work with others to make a difference to the wider society. Given their consistent and stable presence within most neighbourhoods, and their experience of caring for the sick through hospital chaplaincy, home visiting and care services, there may be an emerging role for faith communities to forge relationships that can inform the new GP consortia being created through the **NHS reform process** and bring valuable local knowledge and perspective to the commissioning process in their area.

6

Funding Advice Services and the Big Society

Context

The Government recognises that it has an active role to play in strengthening the capacity of neighbourhood groups, social enterprises, charities and voluntary groups to take full advantage of new opportunities ahead.

Funding advice services are a crucial mechanism in building the capacity of voluntary, community and social enterprise sector organisations to attract investment into their communities and implement sustainable funding strategies to support their activities.

Funding advice services are delivered by individuals in local voluntary organisations, local authority departments and private consultancies, either as a special service or as part of a package of expertise that includes business planning, project management, market knowledge, basic finance and governance. A growing number of specialist funding advisors are accelerating the development of civil society skills and knowledge in areas like enterprise, commissioning and personalisation.

The wider development and application of funding advice skills and knowledge will be important in attracting investment and developing entrepreneurial behaviour in communities and volunteer-led organisations.

East Midlands Dimension

Funding advice in the East Midlands is characterised by a high degree of collaboration between organisations and across sectors. Strong, effective relationships between funding advice providers and funders, supports constructive dialogue around change and development in funding streams available to civil society organisations. Each county¹ in the region supports a cross-sector network that focuses on funding information and advice. Three pivotal networks are key facilitators of development at a regional level:

East Midlands Funding Forum is led and resourced by funding organisations. Its members include public sector bodies, trusts and foundations, but its events and newsletter also target frontline organisations, advice workers and leaders in infrastructure organisations. EMFF activities enable funding organisations to share information and discuss the changing funding environment at a strategic level.

East Midlands Funding Advice Network is a free to join network of over 240 individuals involved in giving advice on funding strategy and activities to VCS and social enterprise organisations. Currently supported by the Big Lottery Fund's BASIS programme it develops the skills and knowledge of funding advice workers through support to local networks, training, networking events and online promotional services.

A new **Business Advisor Network** hosted by Social Enterprise East Midlands provides support and networking space for specialists in business advice appropriate to the third sector. The Business Advisor Network is part of a programme to develop an accredited standard of business advice skills and knowledge amongst funding advice workers in VCS infrastructure organisations.

Challenges and opportunities

The East Midlands has good frameworks to drive creative and positive thinking about developments in funding. A big challenge for late 2010 and into 2011 is to utilise these frameworks to promote effective adaptation within the sector to enable it to maximise Big Society opportunities. Funding advice workers will need to

- develop and share models of advice and support to enable the implementation of Big Society Bank support for social investment,
- work in partnership with and support Community Organisers to help them secure resources for change in their communities,
- support disadvantaged communities to make good use of the Community First fund,
- aid modernisation of public sector commissioning and,
- enable civil society providers to access modernised commissioning and procurement processes.

In recent years, partnerships between local public sector and the VCS, with funding from Capacitybuilders, Big Lottery Fund and others have begun to develop new models of funding advice, especially around commissioning. Our concern now is that, at a time when their learning and good practice should be shared across the region, these development projects are coming to an end – in some cases prematurely – and potential sources of funding for similar work have not been described by the Government.

Doctor, heal thyself

Effective funding advice workers look for ways for their clients to diversify their income and advice workers should of course heed their own advice. Local authority funding is vital to many, probably the majority, of funding advice services, either through their partnerships with local infrastructure organisations or directly via the authority's community engagement and voluntary sector liaison. With significant cuts to local authority budgets every year for the next four years it seems highly likely that support for funding advice services will be cut. (These cuts may not be identifiable: where funding

advice is just part of an individual's or team's role, the work can be dropped without the quantifiable loss of a 'funding advisor'.)

Alternative sources of resourcing for delivery of funding advice services include grants from LSP's; infrastructure funding programmes like Capacitybuilders and Big Lottery's BASIS programme; and trading activities such as the sale of advice by individuals and consultants. The latter model is possibly one that could replace some of the lost public sector funding, but could not be relied on to provide the support necessary to build the Big Society. Selling funding advice is potentially lucrative however cuts in funding to groups using advice services and the tightening of funding criteria to exclude retrospective fees may be prohibitive to the future of this model. Grant-funded or contracted funding advice services paid for by public sector bodies could be more readily directed to work with the organisations most important for delivering Big Society initiatives.

Grow community support

The growth in civil society activism proposed by the Big Society agenda presents an opportunity for funding advice workers to attract new investment and generate new economic activity in the East Midlands. They could be catalysts for the success of Big Society in communities in the local areas they serve, combining their local knowledge with their understanding of grant funding, enterprise finance, community development, local philanthropy and public sector operations to maximise the value of a range of Government initiatives.

Impact of national policy

National policy impacts on funding advice services in three dimensions:

- Firstly when national policy leads to a change in the type and level of demand for funding advice from VCS organisations;
- secondly when national policy affects funding sources and thinking about funding;
- thirdly when national policy affects the sustainability of funding advice providers themselves.

The Comprehensive Spending Review, Big Society and associated reforms across a range of government departments will have an impact for funding advice services in all three of these dimensions. In turn, funding advice services will have an impact on the Government's success in stimulating Big Society and in minimising the pain to the VCS from local and national spending cuts.

Funding advice providers do their work at the heart of a fundamental conflict that the Government is tackling: the need to serve the public and build our economy while placing tight restrictions on budgets. There is a role for them in helping to deliver many of the government's initiatives to build a stronger civil society. For example,

Modernising public sector commissioning

- Supporting the VCS, social enterprises and co-operatives to be more competitive in tendering for contracts to deliver public services, with expert advice on accessing tender opportunities, making and managing successful bids, and effective collaboration.
- Disseminating and interpreting data to empower communities to open up services to providers from the VCS and social enterprise sectors
- Opening up opportunities for third sector organisations through GP consortium commissioning, advising VCS organisations about bringing local solutions to the doctor's surgery.

Promoting community action

- Aiding the development of local giving, building new links between private and corporate philanthropy and local communities, helping to establish local 'community funds'.
- Working with Community Organisers to help community groups understand and access a wide spectrum of funding opportunities.

- Using existing communication channels to disseminate information about Community First funding and encouraging and guiding small community groups to access the programme.
- Enabling VCS groups to take advantage of new opportunities to run community assets by advising on funding, finance and management.

A more enterprising sector

- Providing business advice for new employee-owned co-operatives, helping public sector workers to become social entrepreneurs and, potentially, to take advantage of resources ordinarily associated with civil society funding.
- Promoting sustainability by facilitating and providing access to business advice and encouraging balanced funding strategies and effective business plans.

7

Health & Social Care and the Big Society

Context

The VCS has a long history of providing health services and social care to people and communities, particularly the most vulnerable in society, for a period pre-dating the creation of the NHS. A recent national survey shows that 22% of all volunteering is directly related to health with a further 22% being sport-related. The main beneficiaries of VCS activity are children and young people (47%), elderly people (23%), people with disabilities (22%) and people of a particular ethnic or racial origin (7%).¹

In addition to services and support that are directly considered to be health and social care, many other activities have a positive benefit on individual and community health and well-being (including educational work, training, housing and community development). VCS organisations are commissioned by the state to provide services as well as operating independently of the public sector. In many cases these organisations have the skills and expertise necessary to provide services for particular client groups and those with specific health and social care needs.

¹ The UK Civil Society Almanac 2010, ncvo

Case study

Self Help Nottingham

For nearly 30 years a small team of specialist workers at Self Help Nottingham have supported self help and mutual aid groups to thrive in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire.

The service offers new and emerging groups free support to get started and advice, training and information to ensure groups provide a quality mutual support service for people living with a range of health and social care related issues.



Their services include an information enquiry service, practical support, training and development, outreach and development work, and an annual Directory of Self Help Support Groups. The charity also offers the opportunity for service user and carer involvement work at strategic and operational levels within local NHS organisations.

Self Help Nottingham is also developing a social enterprise model of sustainable support for groups across Nottinghamshire and the East Midlands. They have been recognised by the Department of Health as a best practice support organisation and are being sponsored to pilot a replication model for the delivery of local self help support and information across England.

The charity has also received funding from the National Treatment Agency to supply media and communications starter kits to new and emerging drug and alcohol recovery self help groups across the East Midlands.

For more information visit www.selfhelp.org.uk

Case study

LhivE

LhivE, run by a group of people from Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland living with HIV, empowers others living with the condition to lead fulfilling and safe lives.

The group aims to realise the rights and responsibilities of individuals living with HIV, representing their needs and wishes in decision making processes that will affect their lives and the services provided to them.

Based at LASS (Leicestershire AIDS Support Services), the group offers peer led support, counselling, group discussions, volunteering and training opportunities, retreat weekends and positive speakers to people living with HIV by those who are best placed to understand and have had similar personal experiences.

The group has also generated some of its own income which means they can expand the services they provide.

For more information visit www.lass.org.uk/lhive.



East Midlands Dimension

The East Midlands Health & Social Care Network was launched in January 2010 as a result of research carried out in autumn 2009 (Skyers-Poorman report). The Network has a membership of over 160 third sector organisations that support and deliver health and social care services. The network comprises a diverse range of organisations that can be categorised as follows:

69 Health specialists e.g. Leicestershire Aids Support Services
35 Social care specialists e.g. Nottinghamshire YMCA
24 Local support services e.g. Erewash Voluntary Action CVS Ltd
38 Local Health and Social Care networks e.g. nva Health & Social Care Forum

The Network exists to:

- Influence health strategy and programmes
- Have direct dialogue with Department of Health
- Engage and inform commissioning processes
- Improve VCS knowledge on future health initiatives
- Participate in specific areas of Health Inequalities work

The network is led by an independent Steering Group. Work to date includes:

- action research and report published winter 09,
- network launch and conference February 2010,
- White paper Department of Health consultation event September 2010,
- Big Society survey October 2010.

The network is an effective mechanism for sharing good practice between third sector organisations and provides a single point of contact for central and regional DH, NHS and local authority leads in social care.

Challenges and opportunities

Equity and Excellence: Liberating the NHS White Paper and the whole raft of accompanying consultation documents outlines the government's proposals to reform the NHS so it is more locally controlled and patients have more choice and control. This reflects Big Society principles and the localism agenda.

However, there is a tension between the traditional notion of a National Health Service which provides universal services that are free at the point of use for all members of society and the government's Big Society agenda of rolling back the state and expecting civil society to step in and take on more responsibility.²

There is real concern that the erosion of the NHS and other health and social care services will spell the end to a health service that is free for all dependent on need not ability to pay. Could more choice and local decision-making in fact increase the likelihood of a postcode lottery health service? On the other hand, could this be a real opportunity for the charitable sector to expand and do what it does best - meet the health and social care needs of the most vulnerable in society?

VCS activity in Health and Social Care includes paid work carried out by professionals in the voluntary sector and unpaid voluntary activity. This covers more formal, coordinated volunteering activity and also care and support carried out by friends and neighbours that may not be formally recorded or recognised. The most popular forms of volunteering activity (after education and religion) are sports & exercise, health & disability, working with elderly people and children & young people. There is evidence that the level of informal, unrecognised volunteer activity (such as providing care for a family or friend) is significantly higher than formal volunteering.³

² Source: Matt Leach's speech to the King's Fund, October 2010
³ The UK Civil Society Almanac 2010, ncvo

The backdrop to the Big Society in the East Midlands is the Comprehensive Spending Review and the government's commitment to reducing the deficit. It has not yet been announced by all local authorities in this region where they are making cuts and what the impact will be on the VCS. However, Nottinghamshire County Council has announced 66% reduction in grant funding for Adult Social Care. This represents a massive blow to voluntary work and community action in this County. It is hard to reconcile the local authority decision with the government's espousal of local communities shaping and delivering local services. Chris Cutland, Chief Executive of Women's Aid Integrated Services (Nottinghamshire) warned that really valuable support services for women and children experiencing domestic violence are likely to be severely reduced or lost.

Health Inequalities

The overall picture of people's health in the East Midlands is close to the England average. However, levels of physical activity in adults, children in Reception year classified as obese and hospital stays for alcohol related harm are all better than the average for England, whilst levels of smoking in pregnancy, breast feeding initiation and infant deaths are all worse.

There are also geographic inequalities in health within the East Midlands which are closely associated with deprivation. For example, the health of people in the relatively affluent districts of Harborough, Rushcliffe and South Northamptonshire is generally better than both the England average and the East Midlands average, while the health of people in Nottingham, Mansfield and Derby is generally worse, reflecting their low economic status and high relative disadvantage.

As highlighted in the Marmot Review (published 2010), the main contributor to the gap in life expectancy is material deprivation (income and poor educational achievement). Educational attainment in the East Midlands, while improving, remains consistently worse than the England average, and is worst in the most deprived communities.⁴

To ensure that the Third Sector Health & Social Care Network is representative of the diversity of the region in terms of age, disability, race, gender, migration, and so forth, it is important to continue to map and target health and social care organisations that represent diverse communities across the broad health and social care arena. These organisations do exist across the region at smaller spatial scales but are nevertheless regional in their reach and/or focus, and have a critical role to play in terms of addressing health and social care priorities from diverse perspectives. These organisations if supported well to input into the work of the Network, have the added advantage of providing rich insights into the needs of communities which are often unaccounted for in health and social care policies and strategies.⁵

Impact of National Policy

Health and Social Care reform

The VCS has a long experience of working in partnership with the NHS and other health and social care services through both grant-aided and commissioned work. Within this relationship the VCS has the ability to fulfil 3 distinct roles: 1) provision of information and intelligence to inform the type and format of appropriate public services; including the facilitation of direct service user input; 2) delivering or co-producing services; often as the most appropriate or closest organisations to those service users most wary of the state or excluded by other means such as language, culture, disability, poverty or isolation; 3) enabling market transformation; working with communities over time to shift need and demand for services.⁶

⁴ Source: APHO and Department of Health. © Crown Copyright 2010

⁵ Health and Social Care Network Development Report, Skyers-Poorman February 2010

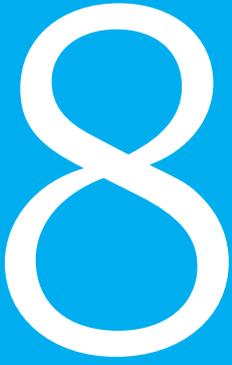
⁶ East Midlands consultation response to Department of Health on 'Equity & Excellence: Transforming the NHS'

Personalisation

Social care and health services are being transformed to give people more choice, flexibility and control over their own lives. **Think Local, Act Personal: Next Steps for Transforming Adult Social Care** sets out how councils, health bodies, providers and other community organisations will need to work more closely so individuals, their families and carers have greater choice and control over their care and support.

Adult Social Care and Welfare Reform

The ageing population, increasing unemployment during the recession and reform of welfare are likely to put more pressure on civil society organisations to support those in short term crisis and long term need.



Race, Ethnicity and the Big Society

Context

In mid 2009 the Office of National Statistics estimated the total UK population at 61,792,000. The most recent data available on Ethnicity (2001 census) showed 7.9% of the population belonging to a non-white ethnic group. As the government introduces reforms to public services and devolution of power to local communities, there will be a need for positive action to ensure the participation and uptake of the new rights by everyone, including Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BME*) groups as traditionally excluded communities.

* BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) is a term in widespread usage and has been for many years, but we recognise its shortcomings, including its lack of reference to Asian groups, refugees, new communities and white ethnic groups. The fact is that all labels are unsatisfactory and tend to be used as a matter of convenience.

Case study

African Initiative Support

Founded in 2003 in Nottingham, African Initiative Support (AIS) is a voluntary and community organisation, driven by the needs of African residents for culturally sensitive support to help them to access key services.

AIS aims to relieve poverty, distress and improve the quality of life of Africans, particularly refugees and asylum seekers living in Nottingham and surrounding areas by providing services in the areas of education and training, health promotion, orientation and advice, culture and other philanthropic activities.

In Autumn 2009, AIS commissioned a paper researching the needs, skills and experiences of the African community living in the city. The project was managed by the organisation alongside a steering group of community members, and several African and refugee groups.

The steering group continues to meet regularly, working on possible projects, further research, exploring funding opportunities and seeking a stronger voice within the community.

Case study

Wollaton Asian Ladies

Formed in 2006 to provide a meeting point for South Asian women aged over 50 in the local area, Wollaton Asian Ladies provides an opportunity for its members to engage in a variety of physical, social and cultural activities.

The group aims to enable its members to embrace new opportunities and ideas, which enhance and improve confidence, self image, education, health and wellbeing. The group also provides opportunities for mutual support and friendship, where experiences can be shared and coping strategies for difficult situations learnt.

Through its work, the group promotes confidence building, inclusion, development of new and existing skills, health and wellbeing, and awareness of rights and responsibilities, as well as a platform for Asian women to voice their opinions and concerns.

Starting out in front rooms, the group quickly had to find a local community centre to accommodate its' now over 70 members, with classes, including yoga and chair exercises, attended by over 30 women at any one time.

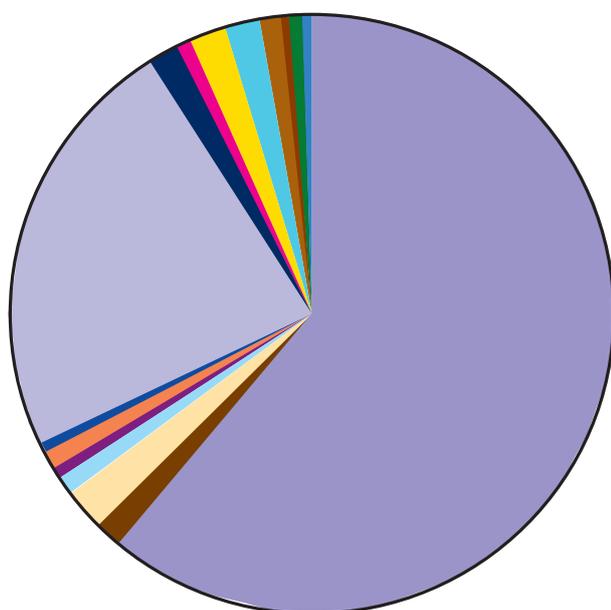


East Midlands Dimension

The East Midlands is a highly diverse and complex region. In terms of ethnicity, the East Midlands has a similar population profile to a number of other regions outside London, with over 90% of residents describing their ethnic group as 'White'. Residents who describe themselves as 'Asian or Asian British' make up the largest BME group in the region, accounting for 5% of the total population in 2007.

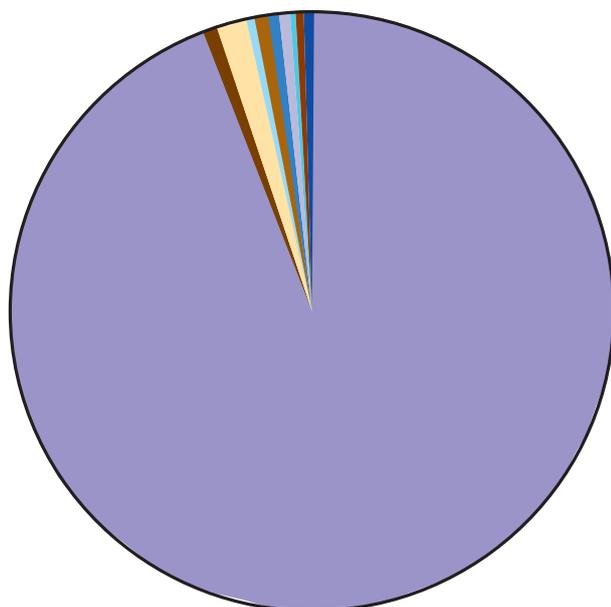
Leicester City accounts for 28.4% of all residents of the East Midlands in BME groups. This is equivalent to approximately 113,400 individuals. Nottingham City accounts for the next largest share, at 13.8% of the regional total. The diversity of the East Midlands population can be demonstrated by comparing the local authority profiles of Leicester City and Rutland:

Ethnicity of Leicester



- White: British
- White: Irish
- White: Other White
- Mixed: White and Black Caribbean
- Mixed: White and Black African
- Mixed: White and Asian
- Mixed: Other Mixed
- Asian or Asian British: Indian
- Asian or Asian British: Pakistani
- Asian or Asian British: Bangladeshi
- Asian or Asian British: Other Asian
- Black or Black British: Caribbean
- Black or Black British: African
- Black or Black British: Other Black
- Chinese
- Other Ethnic Groups

Ethnicity of Rutland



The BME sector is supported by the regional **BME network** which is an independent platform led and directed by BME and equality focused organisations hosted by One East Midlands. The network complements the work of various sub-regional platforms and local equality groups.

The East Midlands BME network aims to:

- Identify the gaps and priorities in BME service delivery and policy influence;
- Provide support and accountability to BME representation within key regional strategic networks;
- Provide tailored information to the BME sector about opportunities, resources, policy changes and other issues which impact on the sector in the region.

Challenges and opportunities

As regional structures are eroded and planning decisions devolved to local areas, there is a real possibility that local authorities will decide not to set aside land for Traveller sites which has potential implications for the human rights of many Traveller communities within the region and is in contrast to the Big Society ideals.

Lack of English language skills is a barrier to employment, to accessing health and other services, and to helping children achieve their educational potential. Social inclusion is hard to achieve where there is no shared language. Investment in ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) may have a positive impact on the lives of individuals and society; improving access to services (including support into employment) alongside the ability to participate in wider community activities and volunteering.

In ethnic groups where there is a significant under resource of the provision of appropriate carers; family and friends already take on a huge burden of unpaid caring responsibilities. Under the Big Society, there is a risk that marginalised groups, including racial minority groups, will be pushed even more to the fringes. In culturally diverse localities, such as those that can be found within our region, the groups most likely to step up to run local services, will not necessarily be representative of the community as a whole.

Community leadership can be a complex and political issue in many BME communities. The appointment of community advocates must be approached cautiously, with the need to ensure community accountability. Some potential advocates will need training, support, and mentoring to begin to serve their communities. It is important that the skills and knowledge of specialist BME support organisations are sought in order to navigate community tensions and issues without causing disengagement or discrimination.

The Government promises to open up public services for delivery by any sector, including VCS, wider third sector and private companies. This means there will be potential opportunities for BME VCS organisations to deliver services within their communities but in competition with the private sector. Procurement processes must give adequate weighting to knowledge, understanding and ability to engage with BME beneficiary communities to ensure that service delivery is appropriate and accessible. In doing so BME VCS groups will be able to compete and maximise the value of their community reach.

Race and equality issues often polarise communities. The Big Society Agenda and the localism focus on neighbourhoods brings additional challenges for ethnic minority groups as many BME communities go beyond the 'square mile'.

There appear to be no safeguards in place to ensure vulnerable and marginalised groups will be provided for in terms of equality of access to public services. There is a risk of service providers merely focusing on those who are able to access services with relative ease and not considering those who would benefit most but who are not currently engaged. A lack of culturally sensitive homelessness or health services may disproportionately affect BME women and young people.

BME communities in rural areas (the East Midlands being the third most rural region in the UK) are further affected by isolation, underdeveloped cultural awareness and the distance from specialist support services. As demographically, racial minorities account for such a small percentage of the population in rural areas - Lincolnshire having only 3.4% non-white population¹ the ability to influence local priorities is limited.

The adverse effect of the localism agenda and Big Society on women in particular has been widely commented on, single mums being highlighted as the most 'time poor' and least able to participate in the opportunities presented by the Big Society. Women from racial minority groups have traditionally suffered multiple discrimination and many BME women find themselves unable to influence or contribute to decision making processes in their local areas.

BME communities are already suffering disadvantage and the mainstreaming agenda has led to the withdrawal of many BME specific support services, particularly within the VCS. Most BME specific organisations directly support community voice and influence, develop and support BME volunteering and deliver tailored services to meet local need. The loss of funding for BME infrastructure will directly impact on the ability of BME groups to engage with the Big Society approach.

Impact of National Policy

The **Equalities Act**, which came into force in October 2010, consolidated and replaced all previous discrimination legislation; establishing nine 'protected characteristics' one of which is race. Although the legislation covers the provision of services, an exception in the legislation means charities can restrict the provision of benefits to people of a protected characteristic if certain criteria are met. This could be viewed as potentially good news for specialist support services who may deliver to a very closely defined beneficiary group.

Afiya Trust most recently articulated the extent of the impact of the proposed **NHS reforms** in their published response to the white paper stating:

"We welcome the proposals to put patients and public at the heart of healthcare and to devolve power from the centre to local areas. These are in many ways in tune with what BME communities have campaigned for over a long period of time. The proposals to increase access to information and choice are also in tune with what the communities have been asking for. The Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) of the White Paper acknowledges that inequalities exist in access to information, awareness of choice, pathways into care, satisfaction with GP and other services, and health outcomes.

However, we are concerned that details about how the new structures and processes will address race equality and ensure that the specific needs of ethnic minority communities are met are unclear. It is also not clear what structures and mechanisms will be put in place to ensure that the voices of those most marginalised in society are heard within patient and public involvement processes."

Proposed **welfare reforms** will disproportionately affect BME communities. The impact of **Housing Benefit** reform in particular has not been fully considered with regard to BME communities who may have larger families and therefore require larger, higher rate homes and may find themselves on unemployment benefits for more than a year due to language or discriminatory barriers to securing employment.

¹ ONS Crown Copyright, Estimated resident population by Ethnic Group (experimental statistics) 2007.

9

Rural Communities and the Big Society

Context

The rural 'Big Society' is already well developed. New government policies can offer opportunities to strengthen local action within communities by building on what already works well. This can help manage the inevitable reduction in public service expenditure, whilst bolstering the vibrancy and sustainability of rural communities.¹

¹ ACRE position paper – Implementing the Big Society

Case study

Rural Community Action Nottinghamshire

Rural Community Action Nottinghamshire (RCAN) is the primary rural development specialist organisation for the county, providing specialist rural knowledge and intelligence to influence and advocate on behalf of its rural communities.

Throughout their 85 year history, the organisation has encouraged, supported and enabled people in activities that benefit those who work and live in their local area. RCAN's main areas of expertise include rural intelligence, community planning and support, transport and access, health, economic regeneration, the environment, and regional rural policy influence.

An important area of RCAN's work is assisting parishes with their preparation of community led plans, helping them overcome difficulties by providing support and advice, raising issues at strategic levels, improving communication, providing encouragement and using their experience of similar problems elsewhere to assist others.

One example of this in practice is Normanton on Soar, where building on a parish plan enabled parishioners to open a new village hall and community shop. The parish council also received recognition with a quality status.

For more information visit www.rcan.org.uk



East Midlands Dimension

The population of the East Midlands is estimated at 4.5 million with around 30% of people living in rural areas. 88% of East Midlands' land area is classified as rural making it the third most rural region in England.

The East Midlands rural population is both growing and ageing faster than in any other region and faster than the urban population.² Population growth inevitably puts pressure on existing rural facilities and resources. This has implications for local capacity to cope with increased demand for services.

Rural parts of the East Midlands find it difficult to retain high levels of enterprise and skills locally as people are drawn by businesses in urban areas. There are however relatively high levels of activity in agriculture, forestry, fishing and tourism which are inherent to the countryside.³ New policy developments associated with the Big Society will need to link with the socio-economic realities of rural communities.

The average rural home in the East Midlands costs 8.5 times the average regional income⁴ resulting in a growing affordable rural housing crisis. This is particularly evident in the high value rural locations of the Peak District and Rutland in contrast to the relative poverty of the former North Nottinghamshire coalfields and coastal Lincolnshire. More flexible local planning policies will enable villages to grow and adapt to economic circumstances and meet local housing needs.

The rural VCS comprises 5 countywide Rural Community Action networks, a regional presence for the CPRE and numerous smaller voluntary and community groups working directly in and with rural communities.

Challenges and opportunities

Affordable housing, transport, climate change, unemployment and an ageing population have an impact on how services are delivered to rural communities and how communities are going to engage and participate in delivering the Big Society.

Access to services is a priority for rural communities and individuals, due to rural isolation and exclusion. Local evidence demonstrates that individuals in rural areas are disadvantaged in their ability to undertake normal activities unless they have access to a car at all times.⁵

Parish Paths and the former Rural Action Scheme have encouraged rural communities to come forward with their own ideas in response to specific intervention areas. These models encourage community participation in analysing and appraising local needs and resources and further devising solutions and means for service delivery. Such models position rural communities well for applying principles of the Big Society.

Volunteering in rural communities has always been popular. The running and maintenance of village halls, maintaining public paths and community care consistently attracts volunteers. In addition, the role of the Parish Councillor, although considered centrally as a democratic layer, relies heavily on voluntary principles and community ownership for success. There are a relatively high proportion of people at pensionable ages in rural areas offering a potential pool of volunteers. However rural isolation due to sparse settlement patterns is a challenge for participation in delivering the Big Society. Resources are needed to support, maintain and link volunteers.

² East Midlands Development Agency (emda) www.intelligenceeastmidlands.org.uk

³ East Midlands Rural Affairs Forum <http://www.ruralaffairs.org.uk/uploads/plan/Framework.pdf>

⁴ East Midlands Rural Affairs Forum <http://www.ruralaffairs.org.uk/uploads/plan/Framework.pdf>

⁵ Social Exclusion Unit Report – Making the Connections, 2004

Broadband technology has transformed the ability of communities to access services and information. There is however a desperate need for investment to support broadband improvements in rural areas where speeds are lower and connectivity can be intermittent. In some areas there is no connectivity at all.⁶ Rural communities are sparsely populated and improving broadband services will enable people to be able to access and plan services from the comfort of their homes.

A regional focus on rural issues, through the East Midlands Rural Affairs Forum has been crucial for maintaining strategic development of issues such as affordable housing, transport and broadband. These issues cannot be addressed with a purely local focus but must be strategically developed in consideration of wider socioeconomic factors.

Impact of National Policy

The **Localism Bill 2010** extends new rights to communities including the ‘right to buy and right to bid’ and will enable local communities to take ownership and control of key local facilities. Traditionally rural communities respond to market failure with community led approaches which help minimize the impact on those most in need of local services.⁷

The **Housing Minister** has announced the intention to give rural communities that want to build new homes, the power to bypass planning processes. This will encourage communities to take local initiatives to respond to local needs.⁸ There are challenges associated with community capacity where local housing trust proposals bypass the planning system and local authorities cannot assess and agree physical changes to road access, drainage and other infrastructure.

The **Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs** has announced its intention to reform public forestry land estate and is selling off Forestry Commission land. However there is controversy in this scheme as many people believe this type of land is at risk and needs protection. The VCS in rural areas has an opportunity to take over land where they think their role and involvement will enhance protection and conservation of the environment.⁹

The **Rural Development Programme for England** is an EU funded programme delivered at regional level for the development of the rural economy. RDPE in the East Midlands funds a number of progressive and successful rural programmes. RDPE is currently supported by the Regional Development Agency for the East Midlands (emda) and the announcement to abolish the RDAs puts this valuable programme, alongside other major European regional investments, in jeopardy.

⁶ East Midlands Rural Affairs Forum <http://www.ruralaffairs.org.uk/uploads/plan/Framework.pdf>

⁷ Acre (2010) Building the Big Society

⁸ <http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/core/page.do?pagelId=12784563>

⁹ <http://www.buildinglanduk.co.uk/forestry-land-for-sale.htm>

10

Volunteering and the Big Society

Context

Voluntary activity is the bedrock of the VCS and this is a time of dramatic change for volunteering as it is given a more prominent role in the Big Society agenda. The Citizenship Survey shows that 41% of the UK population volunteer formally once a year. It is estimated that an even larger number of people volunteer informally, by giving unpaid help to people who are not relatives (outside any formal setting). Based on a survey of volunteering across the East Midlands carried out in September 2010, around 15,000 people have been supported into formal volunteering roles in the last year with more than 20,000 volunteering opportunities still available.

Case study

New Parks Community Boxing Gym

Based in the New Parks area of Leicester, the New Parks Community Boxing Gym was awarded funding by the Leicester Sound V Project to engage 30 young people, aged 16 to 25, in volunteering within the gym in return for gaining recognised qualifications including First Aid training and an ABA boxing tutor qualification.

The funding allowed the volunteer coach and founders of the gym to attract new and younger volunteers, many of whom have remained with them or successfully moved on to employment and further education.

The gym also runs ISSP (intensive supervision and surveillance programme) for young people on the verge of going to prison or who have been recently released, work experience to students in their final year of school, after-school boxing clubs, and a stop smoking and get active programme for local residents.

Initially opened with £10,000 funding from Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland Community Foundation and The Safer Leicester Partnership, the gym is now self-sustainable through aluminum can recycling, subs and memberships.

“We work on fitness, respect and self-esteem for all people in the community, regardless of colour or faith.” *Serina Leane, volunteer coach and gym founder*



East Midlands Dimension

There are more than 50 volunteer centres and volunteer support organisations in the East Midlands.¹ Volunteer centres offer a wide range of activities including:

- Providing information, advice and brokerage;
- Signposting to volunteering opportunities;
- Recruiting volunteers;
- Providing training to volunteers and volunteer co-ordinators;
- Peer support/networking;
- Promotion of volunteering.

The East Midlands EVDC network has a membership of over 100 organisations that includes volunteer centres, volunteer involving organisations and volunteer support groups. The membership also includes local authority partners and other volunteer involving agencies in the public sector. Two key funders and supporters of volunteering activity, Big Lottery and Capacitybuilders are also members of the network which is led by an independent chair.

The network has undertaken:

- mapping work into which volunteer involving organisations exist and what services and support they provide (April 2010);
- a volunteering survey which shows numbers of volunteers, volunteer vacancies and evidence of the role and value of infrastructure in enabling volunteering to happen (September 2010);
- and continues to work with Volunteering England and the 2012 Legacy team.

Lincolnshire profile

There are over 26,000 regular volunteers within Lincolnshire-based third sector organisations (there are numerous volunteers who give their time outside the third sector e.g. Special Constables and school governors).

The balance between paid employees and volunteers varies considerably between the sectors in which third sector organisations operate. Education, the biggest third sector employer, supports almost 3,000 jobs across over 800 organisations, but with only 2,200 volunteers. The healthcare, advice and support and sports/leisure sectors all support relatively few direct jobs, but rely on vast numbers of volunteers.

The third sector across Lincolnshire is a very important part of the county's economy. It consists of at least 2,800 organisations supporting over 7,000 jobs and generating over £400 million each year. The community focus of the third sector ensures added value through helping to raise aspirations, getting people back to work and supporting disadvantaged groups within Lincolnshire.

Source: Economic Significance of the Third Sector in Lincolnshire, Lincolnshire County Council, May 2010

Challenges and opportunities

The opportunities for volunteering are likely to be broadened through the Big Society. The challenge is to maximise opportunities for volunteers and maintain the quality of the volunteer experience for the volunteer and, crucially, of any beneficiaries. Public spending cuts could threaten the ability of volunteer centres to continue placing volunteers at the current level and standard. A growth in volunteering can only be achieved with well resourced volunteer support and infrastructure that is accessible to communities in their locality.

¹ East Midlands EVDC mapping 2010

Access to information is very important if people are to be encouraged and motivated to volunteer. People require information about opportunities and support services available, and also expert professional information that can help them take the initiative and be at the forefront of identifying needs and activities that are essential for service delivery in their localities.

The Big Society has cast volunteering as a core element of the strategy to encourage **community social action** and self responsibility. The Big Society highlights the role of neighbourhood working and identifies social enterprises, charities and cooperatives as having a valuable role in running public services. As a result there is an expectation to utilise more volunteers and create more volunteering opportunities. Existing community based volunteer centres have years of experience providing support to groups and individuals and encouraging people to volunteer. This provides a good foundation and support system for the Big Society to promote and progress the role of volunteering.

The capacity and motivation for volunteering varies between individuals, groups and communities. Some people will be more ready and able to engage with their communities than others and some have more control over their time than others. Some people experience additional barriers to volunteering because they have additional needs, including people with physical and learning disabilities and those who cannot afford the upfront costs of volunteering (expenses are rarely paid for in advance).

Volunteer centres offer an effective mechanism of supporting people with additional needs and traditionally 'hard-to-reach' groups into volunteering.

Volunteering is a recognised mechanism in the pathway to developing personal skills, knowledge, workplace experience, confidence and movement from worklessness into employment. However, it must be recognised that individuals all have different starting points along this pathway and have concomitant support needs to be met.

While the government talks about wanting to increase the role of the voluntary sector in public service delivery there is a need to maintain existing infrastructure and resources for use in future service development and volunteer maintenance. There are allied costs to recruiting and maintaining volunteers which need to be taken account of as plans for delivering the Big Society are developed. Training, support and capacity building work has to be embedded in any future delivery strategy.

While the VCS has experience in delivering public sector commissioned and contracted work, this tends to be the big sub-regional, regional and national organisations. Small groups might not have enough knowledge and experience of working in partnership with public bodies and the expectations from the two sectors may conflict. Involving local communities through volunteering to deliver public services will therefore require a change in the working cultures of both public sector organisations and the VCS organisations charged with supporting volunteering and community action.

Impact of National Policy

As delivery of the Big Society agenda is a responsibility for all government departments in essence national government has to ensure that all public services are transparent and accountable and support community participation in delivery. However, any developing national policy which relies on voluntary activism for delivery must take account of the principle that volunteering is by nature 'voluntary' and is not therefore a replacement for paid work – especially when supporting services for vulnerable people.

Conversely, any policy which reduces the individual's capacity and motivation to participate in voluntary activity will directly undermine the Big Society. Examples may include raising the retirement age, removal or reduction of benefits and loss of support grants which meet the additional support needs of some volunteers.

The papers and case studies in this booklet have been written by One East Midlands.

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South Lincolnshire CVS
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Third Sector Health & Social Care Network
TravelWatch East Midlands
VCS Engage East Midlands
Voluntary Action Leicestershire
Voluntary Centre Services North Kesteven
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Wollaton Asian Ladies



One East Midlands is a registered charity, working with the voluntary and community sector.

One East Midlands brings together organisations that support voluntary and community groups across the region to influence and shape policy, improve services and provide a single point of contact for all stakeholders at a regional and national level.

One East Midlands is accountable to its members: voluntary and community organisations, frontline groups, public and private sector agencies. Through its membership, the sector is able to influence One East Midlands' work and ensure that the organisation does what it sets out to do.

For more information on our membership scheme visit the website: www.oneeastmidlands.org.uk



East Midlands Regional Infrastructure Consortium (RIC) brings together regional third sector infrastructure bodies to advance regional infrastructure for the benefit of frontline organisations. EMRIC focuses on infrastructure delivery to maximise the help available to frontline groups, proactively identifying regional capacity building gaps and collaborating with members to meet the identified need.



East Midlands Infrastructure Steering Group (EMISG) coordinates the work of local county-based organisations to inform and add value to the development of third sector infrastructure organisations across the East Midlands. The group believes that local infrastructure, in response to the needs of all local communities, must drive regional and national infrastructure services.