

Summary on a Page: July 2010

Growing the Big Society: Encouraging success in social and community enterprise in deprived communities

What is it?

The Coalition has identified Big Society as one of its key priorities, with social and community enterprises playing a fundamental role in achieving this vision. This report by the Institute for Public Policy Research (ippr) uses several case studies to explore the successes, barriers and challenges for social and community enterprises and concludes with a number of recommendations.

What does it say?

The report argues that the new government, and increasingly local authorities, are supportive of the third sector and social and community enterprises. But there are challenges, particularly in relation to public sector spending cuts; uncertainty over funding post March 2011; and concerns that the drive for public sector efficiency will lead to larger contracts, pushing commissioning and procurement further away from social and community enterprises. The report raises concerns about the lack of established community and social enterprises, stressing there are a lot more 'aspiring' enterprises that currently rely on grant funding.

The case studies presented in this report reveal that enterprises identify several enablers of success: a strong team; networks and profile; service provision and identifying a niche; and the value of organisational review. They also identify several barriers to success: funding and finance; public sector procurement and commissioning (in particular large contracts that smaller organisations may not have the capacity to compete for); accessing relevant (and targeted) support; and developing core organisational infrastructure.

The report concludes that with many contracts and grants expiring post March 2011, alongside a push for greater public sector efficiency leading to larger contracts, there is "a gap between the expectations of the 'Big Society' and reality on the ground". However, it emphasises the opportunities that the Big Society Agenda presents for the Third Sector and makes four key recommendations:

1. Improving dialogue between national policymakers, regional VCS and social enterprise representatives, local authorities and other support agencies; and ensuring money coming through the Big Society Bank and Communities First Fund etc is targeted at areas of greatest need, including support for startup organisations, will help Big Society 'to flourish'.
2. Supporting organisations to reduce reliance on grants and move to more enterprising activity; and conducting organisational reviews to help organisations refocus to a 'more enterprising approach'.
3. Reviewing commissioning and procurement processes, with the involvement of local social and community enterprises, to better understand the needs of the sector.
4. Coordinating support and focusing it on organisations' needs, with an understanding that different types of support, from different providers, are needed at different stages in development.

Any implications?

Whilst the research focuses on the North West region, findings are likely to bear relevance to social and community enterprises, as well as VCS organisations and communities looking to become a social or community enterprise, across the country.

Key links:

-  Read the full report: [Growing the Big Society](#)
-  Read the Conservative Party's pre-election document: [Big Society, Not Big Government](#)