



SCRUTINY COMMISSION – 19 JANUARY 2011

FINAL REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY REVIEW PANEL ON THE BIG SOCIETY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

1. The appended report sets out the interim findings of the Scrutiny Review Panel on the Government's "Big Society" agenda.

Scope of the Review

2. The Scrutiny Commissioners on 29 September 2010 appointed a Scrutiny Review Panel to begin consideration of the Government's emerging Big Society Agenda and its implications for the County Council. Its aim was to identify suitable policy priorities and to consider how, with other partners, Leicestershire County Council can help to support and engage with the voluntary and community sector to assist in the delivery of the Big Society.

Conclusions

- (a) The County Council and its partners should explore opportunities to provide resources to support the identification and support of Community Organisers (COs). Small amounts of funding could be provided to assist COs in securing sustainable funding for their posts from other sources;
- (b) A 'single approach' to working with volunteers should be developed for the County Council – particularly in regard to advertising, recruitment, training, policies and procedures, networking and expenses;
- (c) All relevant future infrastructure and service delivery contracts with VCS organisations should include 'Big Society' considerations, including their specific role in helping to deliver the four local aspirations and ensuring that groups and communities deemed to be 'hard to reach' receive the necessary support to engage in the 'Big Society';

- (d) A training programme could be developed for customer-facing staff across all sectors to assist them in providing information and signposting those wishing to be involved to the appropriate organisations.
- (e) Engagement in Community Forums should be developed to its full potential, with Forum meeting agendas focussing on local priorities, as well as those of public sector organisations. There should be encouragement for all Leicestershire Together partners to increase levels of engagement with and resources made available to, the Forums over the coming months;
- (f) Participatory budgeting sessions via Community Forums assist in empowering communities to make choices about services in their area. The participatory budgeting approach should therefore ideally be extended to cover mainstream services, with the aim of involving communities in key service prioritisation decisions;
- (g) A forward plan should be produced of key decisions at a partnership, corporate and departmental level;
- (h) In order to empower communities of interest, as well as those of geography, further work needs to be done to signpost those communities to their nominated VCS representative organisations and the Leicestershire Together Working Forum.
- (i) Guidance should be produced by the Council and partners on what communities and organisations could achieve in terms of delivering services, illustrated with case studies and examples of good practice to provide inspiration and direction on sources of help and advice, with a particular focus on potential “right to bid” (to run services) and “right to buy” projects;
- (j) Work to map the extent of community involvement in service delivery in Leicestershire, in order to identify potential services in the County, that could be delivered as/more effectively at community level, should be completed;
- (k) The Council and VAL are currently undertaking mapping of mutual, social enterprise and co-operative activity in the County. The next stage is to identify the specific advice/support required to support and grow this sector in Leicestershire, including the formation of new social enterprises and co-operatives, and explore how these advice/support needs could be addressed.
- (l) It is important to establish some ‘basic standards’ of service provision and then fulfil an overview and ‘monitoring’ role to assess who is most appropriate to undertake work, whilst maintaining a ‘light touch’ approach.

Recommendations

3. **The Scrutiny Commission is recommended to support:**
 - (a) **the interim findings of the Panel and refer these to the Cabinet for its consideration;**
 - (b) **the need to continue work to address the Big Society policy agenda and for the Panel to reconvene in 2011 to complete their work with particular reference to:**
 - **The Localism Bill and other key emerging documents;**
 - **Evidence from various voluntary organisations, the Interfaith Forum for Leicestershire, District and Borough Councils and County Council departments;**
 - **Consideration of the risks associated with the effective delivery of the ‘Big Society’;**
 - **Consideration of the measurability of outcomes;**
 - **More information about mutuals, social enterprises and co-operatives;**
 - **Consideration about the “rights and responsibilities” inherent in the ‘Big Society’ concept**

Resources Implications

4. The Big Society initiative will be dependant upon pump priming resources and support in kind in order to maximise its success. It is proposed that a risk assessment should be undertaken in order to identify key risks to the effective delivery of Big Society in Leicestershire.

Equal Opportunities

5. A number of the proposals in this report make reference to communication with all communities, especially those deemed to be hard to reach, in order that everyone has an equal opportunity to engage in the Big Society agenda.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alerts Procedure

6. None.

Background Papers

10. Report to the Cabinet dated 16 November 2010 – Community Forum Participatory Budgeting Pilot – Interim Evaluation

List of Appendices

Appendix – Interim Report of the Review Panel on the Big Society