



# The Big Society: Looking after ourselves

What the Big Society means for community safety

---

# Foreword

---

The Big Society approach played a prominent role in the Conservative general election campaign and since the formation of the coalition government has increasingly featured in policies being developed in Whitehall. This includes the crime and policing sphere.

The 'Policing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century' consultation document published in the summer refers to the concept of the Big Society and outlines some ways it will be relevant to cutting crime. It calls, for example, for a reform to the approach to cutting crime, with everyone, including individuals, playing a full part. It also talks of encouraging people to become more involved in keeping their neighbourhoods safe – ranging from increasing the reporting of crime, to getting people to look after their neighbours and participating in Neighbourhood Watch, through to volunteering more formally in the community safety and criminal justice arena as special constables and victim support volunteers.

What constitutes a Big Society approach is still very much evolving. The proposals in 'Policing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century' provide some headline examples of what a more active role for citizens in cutting crime could mean, but further discussion on what it means for councils' and Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) in making communities safer is only really just beginning. There are a range of questions that remain unanswered, and there will be an ongoing conversation about the role of Big Society in cutting crime.

This publication is designed to provoke local conversations about what the Big Society means in the huge range of communities that CSPs serve, and the role it has in making these communities safer. It looks at what the government has said about Big Society, the role of councils in the Big Society agenda, and then looks at some of the elements that could go into a Big Society approach to making communities safer.

Our thoughts are of course, only one way of approaching the Big Society concept and its relation to community safety. You will undoubtedly have a view of what the Big Society means for CSPs and we would like to know what you think. If you are already taking a Big Society approach, or what is set out in this booklet provokes your own thoughts please get in touch with us by writing to us at [community.safety@local.gov.uk](mailto:community.safety@local.gov.uk)

**Cllr Mehboob Khan,**  
Chair, Safer and Stronger Communities  
Programme Board, Local Government Group

---

# What is the Big Society?

---

The Big Society is the government's vision for a redefinition of the relationship between citizens and the state. It is based on the premise that the "big state" has not been effective and is economically unsustainable. The intention behind it is to move from a culture where people look to officials and government to solve their problems, to a culture where people solve the problems they face themselves aided by government.

When talking about the Big Society, government has described it as being made up of three strands:

- social action – people giving their time and effort to causes around them
- public service reform – removing the centralised bureaucracy that wastes money and increasing the range of public service providers and
- community empowerment – creating neighbourhoods in charge of their own destiny.

The government also identifies three techniques to put the three stands into effect:

- devolution to local government and beyond
- transparency and
- finance.

What role do councils have in delivering the Big Society?

The Local Government (LG) Group believes that councils and councillors have a key role to play as enablers and partners at the heart of building strong local communities that are crucial to the development of the Big Society, including:

- councillors being key enablers of the Big Society – by developing their role as community activists holding all public services to account
- councils supporting everyone to participate in the Big Society building on their community development and empowerment
- councils ensuring the Big Society benefits the whole community, not just specific groups or those with the loudest voices
- using the Big Society concept to strengthen representative democracy
- providing tailored services to local people.

---

# Using the Big Society to deliver safer communities

---

If councils are key to delivering the Big Society what role does the Big Society have in making communities safer?

The three strands the government identifies as making up the Big Society approach provide a means for exploring how CSPs can use the concept of Big Society to make their communities safer.

Before examining each of these strands in turn, it is worth bearing in mind that they are not radically new concepts. In fact, councils and their CSP partners have been using the three strands to help them tackle crime and anti-social behaviour for some time. The British policing model after all relies on public consent, and this requires active public involvement in tackling crime, from reporting it in the first place, to giving evidence in court.



---

# Public service reform

---

Councils and the police have long argued for a more localised approach to reducing crime and anti-social behaviour. They have pointed out that central targets and performance management do not allow local responses to local problems, they focus activity on delivering against indicators rather than achieving better outcomes, and they are expensive and inefficient to run.

The LG Group has therefore called for councils and their partners to have much greater flexibility and freedoms to address local issues, with greater powers and responsibilities passed from central government to local government and even down to communities and neighbourhoods. The community safety issues in Devon will be very different from those in Dudley, and within Devon the issues in Exeter will differ from those in North Devon. With no two areas the same it is impossible for Whitehall to be able to design a central system that allows those differences to be addressed. Local areas and their democratically elected representatives are much better placed to be able to respond to the issues as they develop on the ground.

CSPs have never been precious about who provides the services they use. They have taken a pragmatic approach of using what works best to meet local needs, which has meant they commission and work with a range of service providers, including the voluntary, charitable and private sectors. This is often because CSPs recognise that in some instances these types of organisations are better placed to offer the responsive and innovative services they and their communities need. Initiatives for example related to violence against women and girls, are frequently provided by a mixture of mainly local, but also regional and national charities which are vital in providing refuges and advice and assistance to victims of domestic violence.

Commissioning of services from external providers is likely to play a greater role in the delivery of community safety activity, as discussed in the LGA's 'Lean Community Safety Partnership' booklet, the sister document to this publication. The partnerships with the voluntary, charitable and private sector already established by CSPs for the delivery of services, and which the government sees as being an important element of the Big Society will undoubtedly grow and be added to in the future.

---

# Community empowerment

---

Just as councils and the police through CSPs have looked at delivering services through a variety of providers, they have also explored ways of empowering communities and the individuals in them. This has included developing innovative projects to give communities and the public a greater say in local policing and community safety issues.

One means of doing this is to give communities and the public a direct say in how money is spent locally on dealing with crime and anti-social behaviour.

Participatory budgeting exercises have been undertaken in an increasing number of places around the country, and in a policing context have generally seen the communities involved deciding how pots of money are to be spent on community safety activity in their areas.

In 2009 for example, Scarborough Borough Council along with North Yorkshire police, police authority and county council organised such an exercise in one of its housing estates, giving residents a say in how £32,000 should be spent on crime and community safety projects, with the process for involving the local people being designed by residents of the estate. Participatory budgeting has particular relevance at a time of reduced public service budgets.

Another area where CSPs have looked to involve the community more is in dealing with anti-social behaviour (ASB). This has resulted in a number of schemes which see

the offenders addressing the consequences of their actions by apologising to the victims and the wider community. For example in Somerset, Chard and Ilminster Community Justice Panel trains local residents to sit on restorative justice panels. In Preston, NACRO Restorative Justice Centre organised Peer Panels. The panels aim to repair damage done by the anti-social and criminal behaviour of young people and bring together those who have caused harm and those who have been affected by it. Young volunteers sit on the panels and use positive peer pressure to help young offenders understand the consequences of their behaviour and repair harm caused.

The RSA have recently published a pamphlet that suggests that the public's role in tackling anti-social behaviour need not be restricted to the end of the criminal justice process and dealing with and rehabilitating offenders, but could occur much earlier on. This RSA pamphlet discusses whether the public could tackle ASB. In it the RSA suggests that one of the reasons for the increase in ASB in the last few decades has been the public's increasing unwillingness to intervene, which has resulted in a very much top down, 'statist' and professional approach to reducing ASB. The RSA argues that the concept of First Aid training developed in Woolwich in 1878 provides a model (the Woolwich Model – see the resources section for further information) for tackling ASB.

The RSA say there should be limits to what the public should do and advocates the police should deal with violent and dangerous situations. However the RSA's revised Woolwich Model would see members of the public receiving training in basic skills in self-protection and restraint to give people the confidence to intervene, but to do so in a responsible and constructive manner. Under the RSA's model people would also be trained in conflict resolution, mediation and restoration. They suggest the curriculum for this training would be based on the already widely established training given to police community support officers, and the RSA points out that a not for profit organisation already provides such training ([www.dfuse.org.uk](http://www.dfuse.org.uk)).

In Germany, the often quoted 2006 ADT study on ASB across Europe, found that 60 per cent of the public would feel confident to intervene where they saw ASB taking place. The RSA pamphlet suggests moving to a similar position here in England and Wales would help reduce ASB from occurring in the first place, which could reduce the burden on community safety budgets. There are a number of questions about the practicality and safety of the RSA pamphlet's suggestion that the public take such an active role, but preventing crime and ASB occurring in the first place is likely to have a more prominent role in the future given the impact it has on crime and the savings it allows CSPs to make.



---

# Social action

---

Greater direct involvement by the public is already important to the police and CSPs in cutting crime. More than any other types of public service, policing and community safety relies on people volunteering their time and effort. The importance of the public in reporting crime and providing evidence has already been mentioned, and without it the police and other partners would find it much more difficult to reduce crime. Councils and their CSP partners however rely on more than the public reporting crime; they rely on the public taking much more active roles.

The roles and the degree to which people are involved ranges from neighbourhood watch groups which provide the police with a means of passing on and receiving important information about crimes in an area, through to those members of the public who serve as magistrates.

Neighbourhood watch groups have of course, extended to other sections of society with many businesses now working closely with the police to reduce crime through groups like pub watch. Public involvement in watch schemes has started to become more active as schemes like community speed watch rely on local residents giving some of their time on a regular basis to help make their neighbourhoods safer.

These existing models offer the public a range of ways, and degrees of involvement, to play a greater role in reducing crime in the areas where they live. The Big Society concept relies on these sorts of structures and also offers a means for strengthening and reinvigorating them. These existing bodies and structures also provide an opportunity over time for increasing the extent of public involvement in reducing crime. Involvement in a watch scheme could lead to people volunteering for other roles. A role the government is keen to expand is that of special constable. In the 1950s there were around 67,000 special constables compared with the current level of around 15,000, and the government would like to see this number increase.





Consideration is being given to what incentives can be provided to encourage people to serve as special constables, and media reports suggest the Association of Chief Police Officers and the government are looking at council tax rebates for members of the public who become special constables. An increase in the number of special constables would bring a valuable local and lay person's perspective to policing, and would also go some way to compensating for the loss of any police officers, as a visible presence on the streets could be maintained.

Whether the incentives the government is considering materialise in practice, social action is going to have a continuing and vital role in making communities safer in the future. Watch schemes, and more active volunteering, provide a significant means for councils and CSPs to increase the resources available to them. The government sees a greater role for them so they will undoubtedly be an integral part of the Big Society when it comes to reducing crime.



---

# Resourcing the Big Society and public involvement in community safety activity

---

The public is the most readily available resource to all partnerships in tackling crime. However sustaining and expanding the level of social action and engagement in local communities in any sphere let alone the community safety arena is something councils have found challenging over a long time.

How then can councils and their partners encourage, stimulate and then sustain the public's involvement in tackling crime? CSPs need to engage with residents in a new way. There needs to be a shift from consultation to participation, with communities working together with public services to **co-produce** solutions in their locality. That requires a change in emphasis from residents being passive recipients of services to being co-designers and deliverers of services.

Co-production of services in this way would mean that consultation becomes participation through building new networks of support in communities, facilitating community organisers and assisting the establishment of new organisations such as social enterprises and co-ops. For CSPs this means a focus on identifying strengths and assets in local communities, building capacity within their communities and creating opportunities for co-production in their localities.

Before looking in more detail at what co-production means, encouraging greater involvement is always eased if there is some funding available. CSPs own budgets provide one potential source, but are quite likely to be extremely limited in the future. A possible source of funding may be available to community groups themselves from the Big Society Bank. This will use money from dormant bank accounts along with funds from the private sector to provide finance to bodies lending to charities, social enterprises and community groups. More details on how this will work will be available as the government develops the policy.

---

# What is co-production?

---

Co-production means the users of public services are instrumental in the design, planning and delivery of specific services or broader social outcomes as a way of improving the service or activity and rebuilding the local community.

Co-production:

- demands that public service professionals shift from fixers who focus on problems to enablers who focus on abilities
- changes people from being 'voices' to being participants in the design and delivery of public services
- values people as contributors and builders of local solutions
- allows public services to become catalysts and facilitators rather than simply providers
- provides opportunities for personal growth and development of people's capacities so that they are treated as assets, not burdens on an overstretched system
- uses peer networks instead of just professionals as the best means of transferring information and capabilities
- identifies the hidden assets that public service users represent, and makes public services into engines that can release those assets into the neighbourhoods around them
- recognises that people need to be rooted in mutual support networks and reciprocal relationships.

Co-production moves far beyond engaging residents in setting priorities for action, to establishing opportunities for local people to create those actions themselves. It is not about volunteering. It is about mutual support and networks of relationships rather than a clearly defined demarcation between volunteers and receivers of those services. Instead of just being on the receiving end of volunteering or services, people are invited to help. Co-production is a distinct mindset and ethos that leans less on delivery and much more on facilitating people to help themselves and each other. Whilst professional expertise is still essential, it harnesses the knowledge that comes from personal experience and institutes change by combining both.

---

# Facilitating participation

---

An invitation to help, no matter how well intended, cannot be responded to unless people have the confidence, skills and capacity to participate. They also need the material means (such as access to information, IT, communications and premises). CSPs can play a key role in assisting co-production through creating new learning opportunities, facilitating mobilisation of networks, making practical resources available to groups and providing continuity and support for participants. CSPs seeking to develop a co-production approach in the design and delivery of services will need to pay attention to equality of opportunity.

Sherry Arnstein's ladder of participation is a useful way of understanding the different ways in which people participate in their communities. At its lowest rung the ladder is about informing people about what is planned, and then moves through consulting, deciding together, acting together to the final rung of empowering where people are helped to do what they want. Co-production principles move CSPs beyond the lower rungs to the higher.

Encouraging social action and empowering communities will not happen through consultations or at statutory meetings: it needs to happen at the point of delivery and through conversation and dialogue rather than choice alone. Word of mouth is a key way in which people find out about and begin to participate in initiatives. The personal invitation goes a long way in encouraging participation and operational staff have a key role to play in mobilising networks.



---

# Moving forward: implementing the Big Society

---

Increasing local social action and empowering your communities is about more than volunteering. Instead its focus is on using the public service infrastructure to mobilise public service users, their family and neighbours, so that every housing estate, school, surgery, or shopping precinct becomes, as part of its fundamental purpose, a hub of increasing local action. When setting annual priorities in their plans, CSPs will want to show how they will incorporate Big Society principles into their strategies. For each priority the Community Safety Strategy will want to consider how it will deliver on the Big Society ambitions.

Councils have been delivering on elements of the Big Society agenda and looking to strengthen their communities for a while. However sustaining social action by local

residents and empowering communities will need to be done in a fundamentally different way in an environment where councils and CSPs have significantly less funding. Co-production provides a framework and set of principles for working in a different way. It is one approach to decision-making and service design rather than a specific method. There is no one model; every area is different and the solutions will vary between urban and rural, village and town. Creating the opportunities for co-production will require CSPs to focus on skills development, network building, facilitating groups to access practical resources, investing in community organisers and ensuring both strategic and operational level staff have the mindset and skills to work as facilitators of local action.



---

# Resources

---

Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA): *The Woolwich Model - Can citizens tackle anti-social behaviour?*

[www.thersa.org/about-us/rsa-pamphlets/the-woolwich-model](http://www.thersa.org/about-us/rsa-pamphlets/the-woolwich-model)

National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA): *THE CHALLENGE OF CO-PRODUCTION How equal partnerships between professionals and the public are crucial to improving public services*

[www.nesta.org.uk/areas\\_of\\_work/public\\_services\\_lab](http://www.nesta.org.uk/areas_of_work/public_services_lab)

Carnegie Trust Rural Development Programme *Beyond Engagement and Participation- User and Community Co-production of Services*

[http://rural.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/beyond\\_engagement\\_and\\_participation-user\\_and\\_community\\_co-production\\_of\\_services](http://rural.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/beyond_engagement_and_participation-user_and_community_co-production_of_services)

New Economics Foundation (NEF): *Public Services Inside Out - Putting co-production into practice*

[www.neweconomics.org/publications/public-services-inside-out](http://www.neweconomics.org/publications/public-services-inside-out)

*Ten Big Questions about the Big Society and ten ways to make the best of it*

[www.neweconomics.org/publications/ten-big-questions-about-the-big-society](http://www.neweconomics.org/publications/ten-big-questions-about-the-big-society)

*Right Here, Right Now: Taking Co-Production into the Mainstream*

[www.neweconomics.org/publications/right-here-right-now](http://www.neweconomics.org/publications/right-here-right-now)

The Big Society Network: The Network provides a toolbox of advice, case histories and links to people and resources

[www.thebigsociety.co.uk/](http://www.thebigsociety.co.uk/)

---

# Acknowledgement

---

Special thanks to to Siobhan Riordan, Senior Lecturer, University of East London and Director of Learning Communities Training [siobhan.riordan@virgin.net](mailto:siobhan.riordan@virgin.net) who wrote the initial draft of the paper. The sections of the paper on co-production as well as a number of the examples cited in it were provided by Siobhan or draw heavily on her work.

## Local Government Group

Local Government House  
Smith Square  
London SW1P 3HZ

Telephone 020 7664 3000

Facsimile 020 7664 3030

Email [info@local.gov.uk](mailto:info@local.gov.uk)

[www.local.gov.uk](http://www.local.gov.uk)



**Local  
Government  
Group**

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

---

  

  

© Local Government Group, October 2010

For a copy in Braille, Welsh, larger print or audio, please contact us on 020 7664 3000.

We consider requests on an individual basis.

L10-678

ISBN 978-1-84049-744-1