

**22 FEBRUARY 2011**

**Engagement and Utilisation of the Voluntary and Community Sector / Big Society**

**Ward(s)** All

**Portfolios:** Cllr Z Ali – Communities and Partnerships  
Cllr C Towe – Finance and Personnel

**Executive Summary:**

This report is to:

1. Update the Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel on the latest policy development relating to the Big Society
2. Report on the National Charities and Social Enterprises survey
3. Form part of an introduction to a workshop on developing the Big Society in Walsall (Workshop programme attached at appendix 1)

**Reason for scrutiny:**

This report is being brought to the Panel at the request of the Chair Cllr Louise Harrison following discussion on the same subject at previous meetings.

It is anticipated that subsequent to the workshop to be run as part of this agenda item, that the Panel will raise questions and identify further work to be completed towards developing the Big Society in Walsall.

**Recommendations:**

**That:**

1. The Panel considers the information presented concerning the Big Society and agrees a set of recommendations and actions to be taken.
2. The Panel may wish to make recommendation over how the council will organise to respond to the Big Society.
3. The Panel defers the item concerning the National Charities and Social Enterprises survey.

## **Background Information:**

### The Big Society – Latest Developments

The Big Society features regularly in the daily news. A clearer picture of what the Big Society means is emerging. This is a vision of greater scale and impact than might have been imagined and is a future in which the council's size and role will evolve and services may be outsourced on a significant scale.

The Localism Bill was introduced on 13 December 2010 and is now going through parliament. The Bill transfers powers to councils and through councils to a local level.

The Big Society could place the council increasingly in the role of commissioner, rather than a deliverer of services, depending on local interpretation and policy..

Walsall Council is taking some steps that will enable us to work towards the Big Society. A paper on voluntary and community sector (VCS) funding was recently taken through CMT/Cabinet. This estimates that the financial value of resources contributed by the council to the VCS totals £6.5m. A conclusion of the report is that a pilot to establish relationship officers between the council and organisations in the sector should be continued. This should enable the council to better understand the organisations that it currently works with and supports.

The Estates function of the council is producing a report describing how building assets can be transferred from the council to community groups. This work will be taken further by the Executive Director for Regeneration and the Executive Director for Neighbourhood Services.

### National Charities and Social Enterprises Survey

The National Charities and Social Enterprises Survey is yet to report and so this should be deferred to a later date, once the survey has reported.

### Big Society Workshop

The programme for the Big Society workshop is set out at appendix 1.

## **Background papers:**

This report builds on a report taken to the Panel on 25 November 2010. Further papers referred to in the main content of the report include:

1. Programme for the Big Society workshop (appendix 1)

**Resource and legal considerations:**

The Big Society will have wide ranging implications for resources. As part of the Big Society, Government will shift control and responsibility from the state to local people and groups. This will not only change how the council will deliver services, but will put into question whether the council will deliver services. There will be legal and financial control implications, which the council should begin to work through.

**Citizen impact:**

The Big Society will fundamentally impact upon residents. As the State is rolled back, it is anticipated that residents will come forward as appropriate to solve local problems and deliver services in their own communities.

**Environmental impact:**

The Big Society has the potential to impact on the environment. Early indications suggest that there is already a strong willingness from residents to take ownership and care of the environment. For example, Friends of Parks, local churches and fishing groups taking care of land. The Big Society will place more responsibility on individuals to play their part in other environmental concerns such as recycling, energy use, transport and pollution.

**Performance management:**

The Big Society could lead to the need for a completely new approach to performance management. It could lead to extensive outsourcing of council services, depending on local policy.

**Equality Implications:**

As policy is not yet fully developed it is not yet possible to undertake a meaningful equalities impact assessment. This should be undertaken at a later stage.

**Consultation:**

No consultation has been undertaken. However, voluntary and community sector groups have been invited to take part in the workshop so that their views, expertise and experience are taken into account.

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## Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel

### Big Society

#### Workshop

1	Big Society Presentation	Clive Wright	10 min
2	<p>Discussion Groups</p> <p>a. How can Walsall Council improve the transfer of building assets to community groups? What are the pitfalls and safeguards? What recommendations would you make?</p> <p>b. What services could be transferred from the council to existing employee cooperatives or community groups? How should the council respond to requests or pressure to transfer services. How much, how fast? What recommendations would you make?</p> <p>c. How ready is the voluntary and community sector for the Big Society? What preparation does the sector need to make? How should the Council support this? What recommendations would you make?</p> <p>d. How can the council move towards a commissioning model? How will commissioning be open to influence from communities? What will the roles of councillors be in commissioning? What recommendations would you make?</p>	All	20 min
3	Report back on recommendations	Clive Wright	20 min
4	Summing up	Chair	5 min
5	Close		