



wandsworth voluntary sector development agency

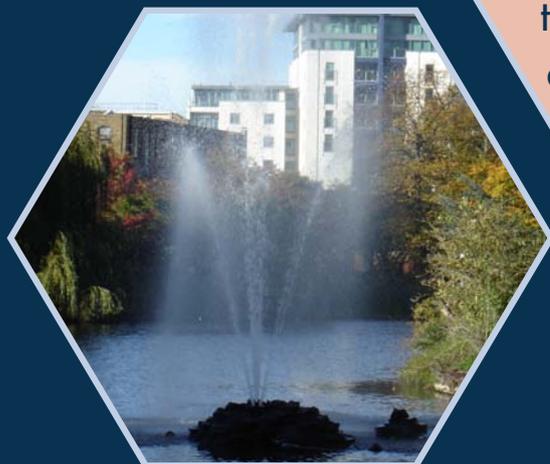
enabling voluntary action

What will the Big Society agenda mean for the voluntary and community sector in Wandsworth?

We, the voluntary and community sector, are already actively trying to make our society better - where do we fit in?

Giving power to local communities and giving power to local authorities are not the same thing - where do the two meet?

How can we ensure that new projects, groups, initiatives and volunteers are adequately supported?



A summary report from the September 2, 2010 meeting with local organisations in the London Borough of Wandsworth

Contents

Introduction	2
Speakers	3
Panel presentations	4
Q&A session	5
Feedback to decision makers	6
Participants list	7

Introduction

WVSDA held a meeting on Thursday 2nd September to share thoughts and ideas on what the The Big Society Agenda will mean for Wandsworth.

Fifty participants from around thirty voluntary and community organisations attended 'The Big Conversation' to hear presentations from representatives from Urban Forum, the new economic foundation, and the Big Society Network and to discuss a variety of themes and issues.

Many comments, questions and suggestions were aired in the follow-up question and answer session and the meeting concluded over lunch with a series of round table breakout discussions.

Whilst most of the participants expressed enthusiasm for the concept of a Big Society and anticipated opportunities associated with it, an overriding sentiment coming from the meeting was uncertainty about what the Big Society would actually mean in practice, particularly with respect to financial resources and accountability.

We know that some of the questions and uncertainties voiced by local groups were answered by the presentations and discussions; the evaluation of the event revealed that ten organisations felt more ready to engage after the meeting.

However, a large number of questions and issues were raised during the event which need some guidance from the people and organisations that are driving the Big Society agenda. It seems organisations are not quite ready to accept a concept that prompts serious questions but, to a large extent, urges people to provide the answers themselves.

Speakers



Kate Hathway - Urban Forum

Urban Forum is a national charity and a membership organisation that supports communities to have a greater say over decisions that affect them. They work with members to influence government policy and to influence local decision making.

Kate Hathway is the Forum's Network Development Officer. She organises and facilitates outreach and networking opportunities and she also contributes to policy, research and partnership work.



Anna Coote - new economics foundation

nef (the new economics foundation) is an independent research organisation that focuses on real economic well-being. It aims to improve quality of life by promoting innovative solutions that challenge mainstream thinking on economic, environment and social issues while putting people and the planet first.

A leading analyst, writer and advocate in the field of social policy, Anna Coote is Head of Social Policy at nef. She is also the Commissioner for Health with the UK Sustainable Development Commission (since 2000).



Steve Moore - Big Society Network

The Big Society Network is an organisation being set up to help everyone achieve change in their local area. Its aim is to create a new relationship between Citizens and Government in which both are genuine partners in getting things done: real democracy using human and technological resources and involving business as well as the voluntary sector.

Steve Moore is the Director of Policy Unplugged and the Press Contact for the Big Society Network. He has played an instrumental role in setting up the Big Society Network.

Panel presentations

After an introduction from Stefan Kuchar, CEO of WVSDA, the meeting started with a presentation from Kate Hathway of Urban Forum. Kate compared the adoption of The Big Society to that of the preparation for a wedding – ‘Something Old, Something New, Something Borrowed, Something Blue’. She spoke of her uncertainty about how the Big Society will work, and stressed the need to incorporate lessons learnt from previous work such as that carried out by community empowerment groups.

Anna Coote of the new economic foundation (nef) stated that to her, it seemed like the Government is serious about the Big Society and is putting structures in place to make sure it happens. According to Anna, the Big Society constitutes a turning point in society’s progression and defined it as being about a much smaller state and public sector; having more voluntary input and entrepreneurship; a shift of power from collective to local groups. These changes have come about against a backdrop and function of:

- Economic growth no longer being a certainty
- The need to be environmentally sustainable
- Post war public sector development hasn’t worked

The last keynote speaker was Steve Moore from the Big Society Network who spoke about the three dimensions of the Big Society agenda:

- Political - reforming the public sector, reducing the size of the state and changing its role.
- New Policies - community organisers, national citizen service, Big Society Bank.
- Big Society Network - set up to help people come together to do ‘big’ things .

The Network has no public money and it will rely on input from passionate individuals and mobilise people through a combination of using new



network technologies, digital applications, social media and forming corporate partnerships.

Currently the Big Society Network is working on the concept of ‘Your Square Mile’, a mutual – possibly membership based, which will be used to support people. Steve stressed the urgent need to get people involved and talking and referred to the programme of Town Hall tours proposed all over UK in the next three months to road test ideas. Dates will be announced shortly.

Steve ended his presentation with an open – ended statement that a key idea behind The Big Society is that individuals and groups will define how it works.

Questions and Answers



The ensuing Question and Answers session was lively with a number of concerns and uncertainties raised. These focused on three main themes:

Financing and resources

What resources are going to be made available? Organisations are struggling to survive and if the state will no longer be funding charitable work, who will?

Practical and organisational issues

Will there be eligibility criteria for groups? How will the community organisers link with existing voluntary and community groups?

Accountability, contracts and safety

Will powerful groups be stopped from commandeering all the resources? What rules will there be to ensure safety?

There was genuine confusion among participants regarding how to reconcile the ideas emanating from the Big Society with local realities, particularly in terms of 'how' and 'with what resources' this new vision would be put into place (given that many organisations are already experiencing very high demand for help and resources are stretched to the limit and beyond).

The Panel did not have answers to all the questions posed, mainly because a road map or detailed plan for the roll out of the Big Society agenda does not (yet) exist. Steve Moore stressed that the Big Society Network will support and facilitate rather than provide resources. With respect to accountability, Kate Hathway said she imagined some sort of 'General Power of Competence' would have to be adopted. Calls for dialogue and partnership working from the organisations present were welcomed by the panel, with a caution by Anna Coote against creating relationships that exclude people.

The Q&A session finished with a question from the floor which summed up the overall mood of the meeting, namely

What is one thing that a small group should be doing to fit in with the Big Society?

Answers from the panel included the suggestions that organisations should try to get involved with a bigger network and keep in the know about what is happening, and should get involved in the discussions as much as possible, for example through Town Hall meetings. It would be very important to be there to help define the scope and rules of how the Big Society will work.

It came across clearly that there will probably not be detailed guidance from Government and that many aspects of implementing this agenda will have to be defined locally.

Discussions and feedback

After the questions and answers session with the panel, participants sat down at round tables to discuss issues, needs and opportunities. There were two open tables (facilitated by Kate Hathway, Su Elliot and Kate Allan) and three tables where overarching themes had been set: Volunteering; Local involvement and partnerships; and What tools do we need? (facilitated by Truly Johnston, Lynne Laidlaw and Jo Lofgren).

Conversation flowed freely for over an hour as participants shared their thoughts on the morning's presentations and Q&A session. A mixture of optimism, uncertainty and cynicism was evident at most tables, with key points including:

A facilitating role would be welcome - to provide support. But the biggest challenge is survival and the need for funding, skills and affordable premises.

- We like the tasters, but what's on the rest of the menu?
- We can use our local knowledge to define this agenda, form strong liaison groups and share information.
- The voluntary and community sector is working very hard to meet the needs of local people as it is - how should we change our scope to fit with the Big Society?
- We want a Good Society - that's what we are all working for! How is this different from what we are already working towards?
- Why should we change the way we work if what we do now is working and there is no money forthcoming to help?
- Who is going to fund charities now and in the future?
- We are going to have to cooperate more - even when we have to compete for some things.
- We don't trust the Government's agenda - there is a reality gap between what they are saying and what is happening at the grass roots.
- How will all the new volunteers and community activists mentioned as part of this agenda be recruited and supported to set up self-funded/sustainable operations?
- Some people are simply not interested - there is a lot of apathy. How will they be encouraged to volunteer/engage in their community?
- Networking and information is crucial - we need to keep local support going to connect organisations.
- There is recognised good practice for volunteer management and support - it is not free to run a good volunteer operation.
- We would like to see more openness and a more proactive approach from both local and central government to connect with organisations and with local people.
- Devolving power from central to local levels must come with some incentive for Local Authorities to work closely with local people.

Resources mentioned during the meeting:

- [Ten Questions about the Big Society](#), by Anna Coote, new economics foundation
- [Whitehall Watch](#) - Urban Forum blog
- [Big Society bite sized](#) - Urban Forum briefing
- [Social Reporter Blog](#) from David Wilcox
- Julian Dobson's Blog '[Living with Rats](#)'
- Big Society Network's [Square Mile initiative](#)

Participants list (alphabetical by surname)

Kate Allan
**Balham and Tooting
Community Association**

Elaine Arnold
Separation and Reunion Forum

Aileen Barnes
**Doddington and Rollo
Community Association**

Hanna Blissett
**VSO & Wandsworth Fairtrade Cam-
paign**

Silvia Boarnas
WVSDA

Janet Bonthron
WVSDA

Chris Blyth
**Wandsworth Council,
Economic Development Office**

Carol Burt
Furzedown Youth Centre

Manuel Button
**Wandsworth Community
Transport**

Lisa Charalambous
Central London CVS

Tom Clarke
**SW London and St George's
Mental Health Trust**

Anna Coote (speaker)
New Economics Foundation

Lena Coupland
NHS Wandsworth, Public Health

Judith Crompton
Balham Pensioners' Centre

Siriol Davies
Alzheimer's Society

Senia Dedic
W.O.W Mums

Mac Downes
**Wandsworth Older
People's Forum**

Su Elliot
**Wandsworth Older
People's Forum**

Jane Ellison MP
MP for Battersea

Malik Gul
**Wandsworth Community
Empowerment Network**

Graham Harris
**Doddington West Residents'
Association**

Kate Hathway (speaker)
Urban Forum

Denise Hill
Advocacy Partners Speaking Up

Truly Johnston
Volunteer Centre Southwark

Elin Jones
**Department for Communities
and Local Government**

Justine Kenyon
Wandsworth Council, Arts Team

Stefan Kuchar
WVSDA

Lynne Laidlaw
Sutton CVS

Jo Lofgren
WVSDA

Roberto Masari
Changing Lives Project

Phyllis Maynard
Southside Partnership

Councillor Leslie McDonnell
Wandsworth Council

Anthony Miller
Odyssey Care Solutions for Today

Steve Moore (speaker)
Big Society Network

Lucy Neal
Transition Town Tooting

Justin O'Kello
**Doddington and Rollo
Community Association**

Jenny Purkis
DASCAS

Sarah Rackham
Katherine Low Settlement

Ben Richardson
WVSDA

David Robson
Wandsworth LGBT Forum

Helen Sharrock
Friends of Windmill Allotments

Kirstie Sheehy
WVSDA

Andy Smith
Regenerate

Mo Smith
Regenerate RISE

Amy Taylor
Ladder to the Moon

Eglionna Treanor
Wandsworth Carers' Centre

Alex Wallbank
Advocacy Partners Speaking Up

Clair Waterman
**Gwynneth Morgan
Resource Centre**

Julian Williams
Audit Commission



wandsworth voluntary sector development agency
enabling voluntary action

Wandsworth Voluntary Sector Development Agency

170 Garratt Lane | London SW 18 4DA

Tel: 020 8875 2846 | Email: info@wvsda.org.uk

Web: www.wvsda.org.uk

Company limited by guarantee registered in England number 3743191. Charity Registration number 1078984.



LOTTERY FUNDED