



**KENT PARTNERSHIP MEETING
12 October 2010**

The Big Society Discussion

REPORT

**Chaired by Peregrine Massey,
High Sheriff of Kent**

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Section 1. Introduction

Over sixty people attended a Big Society seminar hosted by the Kent Partnership and included additional public, private and voluntary and community sector representatives.

The seminar included scene-setting presentations on Family Poverty and the Marmot Review, thought provoking personal insights from Ambition Champions, and lively table discussions in which a wide range of views were expressed on four key questions related to the 'Big Society'.

This report summarises the rich material captured during the evening and aims to provide a reference point for future work and discussions moving forward.

The overall headlines from the event can be found in the next section, and on page 4 are the headlines from the table discussions. This is followed by a brief synopsis of the presentations and personal insights. The main report draws out the more detailed issues that emerged from the table discussions.

Section 2. Overall Conclusions

The Kent Partnership seminar showed partners were positive about the big society and developed a number of themes.

There was endorsement of the existing commentary around the Big Society. We can achieve a Big Society in Kent if we take a fundamental look at what it means to be a community and allow each individual can play their role. The Big Society will flourish if it is put at the heart of all we do across the public, private and voluntary and community sectors. The elements that go to make up the Big Society are not new for Kent. Partners thought a large amount of work was already taking place in local communities across Kent and there are tremendous opportunities to build on what is already happening and learn from best practice.

Perhaps the more insightful conclusions from the discussions were those around the questions on barriers and opportunities. There was a clear exploration around many of the barriers such as how best to engage with the often silent majority, how to tackle engrained organisation silos, how to not allow budget reductions to hinder its development and how to reduce obstacles to the Big Society such as bureaucracy and risk averse practices.

There was substantial optimism that there are opportunities as well, notably harnessing the potential of the citizen and the voluntary and community sector to foster confident, responsible and empowered communities, seizing the opportunities of public service reform and developing current relationships and practices to ensure effective place-orientated working with a shared purpose.

Section 3. Round Table Discussion - Headlines

Question 1: What does the Big Society mean to you?

- **Cultural shift from the state to the individual**
- **Localist approach responding to different needs**
- **Communities of interest**
- **Building on the successes already evidenced in Kent**
- **Unified working between public, private, and voluntary, community, and faith sectors**

Question 2: What would it look like – in Kent, a district, a neighbourhood, to a resident?

- **Active and engaged communities**
- **A shared purpose binding communities together**
- **Fostering collaborative cross sector working**
- **Streamlined and effective joint working**

Question 3: What barriers and challenges do we need to address?

- **Securing involvement of the silent majority**
- **Retaining a focus on individual level need and choice**
- **Overcoming risk averse practices**
- **Tackling engrained and protective organisational silos**
- **Inflexible procurement practices**
- **Communicate in a way that others will understand**
- **Developing the Big Society at a time of deficit reduction**

Question 4: What are the opportunities to work together to shape it?

- **Capitalise upon the potential of the citizen**
- **Realising the full potential of the skills and networks of the VCS**
- **Additional support of the private sector**
- **Providing effective leadership through local elected Members**
- **Building on best practice that exists in Kent**
- **Modernising and sharing finance management and support**
- **Seizing the opportunities of the public service reform**

Section 4 Presentations

Family Poverty: Rosalind Turner

The Kent picture

Taking action to tackle family poverty has been a priority for Kent Children's Trust for over three years. We are taking a whole family approach and it remains a priority of the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP).

The opportunity

There is a unique opportunity to link this priority to the three Countywide ambitions proposed as part of the Vision for Kent. The three ambitions provide the framework within which family poverty can be tackled, by taking into account the priorities for economic regeneration across the County and the fostering of a Big Society of responsible citizens.

Where next

There is a locality approach through the new Local Children's Trust Boards which target efforts and resources to meet the needs identified through the development of the new CYPP.

There is a focus on tackling the root causes such as family literacy and building parenting capacity, confidence and employability.

Learning is taking place from DFE's Poverty Pilot (on what is effective) and KCC's Supporting Independence Programmes and Margate Task Force. Integrated working across all services is being strengthened.

Pathways into sustainable employment are being prioritised linking with government programmes around job creation and reduction in benefit dependency and work is ongoing to build resilience and encourage empowerment within our highest risk communities.

Presentation slides can be found at www.kentpartnership.org.uk

Marmot Review: Meradin Peachey and Mark Lemon

Where we are

The overall mortality gap between the richest and poorest in Kent has increased marginally over time. There are downward trajectories in mortality rate across the board but the gap between richest and poorest remains largely unchanged.

Key themes

Reducing health inequalities is a matter of fairness and social justice which requires a 'proportionate universalist' approach to tackling the social gradient.

The impact of health inequalities affects the economy and personal well-being. There are significant costs to the economy of inaction.

Action on health inequalities requires action across all the social determinants of health such as early years, employment and housing.

Moving forward

The framework for delivery proposes a 'big society' ethos with co-produced action focussed on the social determinants of health, empowering people to develop community solutions, and for the public, private and voluntary and community sectors to create conditions where individuals and communities can take control.

Presentation slides can be found at www.kentpartnership.org.uk

Section 5. Personal Insights

Bishop Trevor Willmot:

What is the big society?

An ingenious way of still talking about society as a living reality, given the projected cutbacks in state funding or

A way at looking afresh at what it means to be society or community, not dependent upon what the state can do, or what the markets can provide but what we as local communities and individuals can contribute.

What is our understanding of the citizen and citizenship?

As faith communities, voluntary organisations and groups of people working to help disadvantaged communities, we have much to bring to the debate. We are there on the ground already and do not have a vested interest other than the wellbeing of others. We are here, have been for some considerable time and have not walked away. We have an understanding of community, as a shared purpose and a shared place.

Citizenship is bigger than self interest. The experience of having a full life means giving something back, being part of a community, not existing as a self-interested individual.

What do I want out of community?

I want a community where people's and communities' needs are listened to. This can require those with the influence and power to open themselves up and be more vulnerable. We need to build trust, which is challenging in a skeptical and cynical society. But small scale interventions that work and deliver can build confidence.

On budget reductions

If the voluntary / community / faith sector is the first to suffer in any reduction in national and / or local funding then the very life blood needed to build the Big Society will be damaged.

Jonathan Shaw:

Who lives in my society?

People do not have a very sophisticated picture of the context in which they live. They do not know how many neighbours they have, or who they are. They don't know how big their town or village is, how many are old or young, how many people in their community live with disabilities or how many people originate from outside the UK. This context is important to help develop a positive and cohesive sense of community and big society.

Using the Countywide Ambitions to 'Ambition Proof' the future

As times get more difficult it will be more important than ever that all effort and resource is used to best effect and support the shared priorities, as set out in

the three countywide ambitions. There should be a relentless focus on the three ambitions. They can be used as an acid test to ensure that policy and practice supports their delivery.

Ambition Proofing Procurement

Another opportunity to maintain a relentless focus on the three countywide ambitions is through procurement practices. Imaginative ways can be worked into procurement processes with an expectation that a private sector enterprise adopts a voluntary and community sector partner that can benefit from the contract, possibly by delivering part of it. This may give voluntary and community groups an alternative income stream at a time when grants are likely to be reduced.

Supporting employment for disabled people

There are more lenient contracting rules involving a contract which supports the employment of disabled people. If a contract is for less than £250k it does not need to go through a tendering process.

Gurvinder Sandher:

Three central themes

From a focus group he recently conducted three 'Big Society' themes emerged:

- Shifting power from the state to local communities;
- Getting individuals involved locally on the ground;
- Voluntary sector to play a key role as enabler along with the public sector.

There are many positive local examples of voluntary sector organisations, such as the Kent Equality Cohesion Council, working across and between public agencies and community groups to take positive action. This has led to sharing local knowledge, expertise and resources all which deliver the 'Big Society' model of getting communities involved.

"Big Society" should not be a cut in frontline services but an opportunity to further develop and empower our communities to do more. It is not about the state retreating but about a different way of working. He endorses the quote from Malcolm Barry, Chair of KentCAN:

: '...the big society should not signal, as some fear, a diminution of the importance of the state but more a transformation in the way it delivers its services: **a move away from direct delivery to facilitator.**'

Presentation slides can be found at www.kentpartnership.org.uk

Section 6. Round Table Discussions - Detail

Question 1: What does the Big Society mean to you?

- **Cultural shift from the state to the individual**
- **Localist approach responding to different needs**
- **Communities of interest**
- **Building on the successes already evidenced in Kent**
- **Unified working between public, private, and voluntary, community, and faith sectors**

Cultural shift from the state to the individual

A vital theme of the Big Society is an ideological shift away from the state towards citizens who have confidence and empowerment. These citizens should have a voice and be heard, want to act and be able to.

‘Opportunity for people to influence matters that affect them’

Partners commented that a key test of any Big Society is whether people take responsibility and play an active role. This was contrasted to the current position of services providing too much support which fosters a dependency culture and results in too many people relying on the state.

Localist approach responding to different needs

The Big Society also incorporates the localist agenda and we must understand that what works best in one area might not be suitable for another. We have a responsibility to listen to communities to understand what ways of working would be best for their community.

It was felt that the Big Society function was to understand people’s needs, engage with them, and support them in responding to their own needs through participation and civic action.

Communities of Interest

Communities are not just geographic places, but also where people can come together because of shared and common interest, circumstances or challenges. These might reflect a huge range of interests such as people living in rural areas, organisations delivering a like service, young people, people living with or caring for people with health problems, people sharing

common interests in the environment or leisure pursuits. Supporting and enabling communities of interest is an important part of responding to the Big Society.

Building on the successes already evidenced in Kent

To many partners the Big Society means an extension or rebranding of a large amount of work which currently takes place in the county.

The voluntary and community sector has been active in communities for many years and public sector organisations are also heavily involved in community engagement and co-production (as evidenced in the case studies circulated prior to the discussions).

It was felt that individual communities will need individual solutions so a formulaic response would not be suitable but current work can and must be built on and learnt from to replicate successes across communities.

‘Mustn’t lose sight of what we have already achieved in delivering
community involvement’

Unified working between public, private, and voluntary, community and faith sectors

A crucial element to the Big Society is the public, private and voluntary and community sectors working together to deliver outcomes for local communities.

For many partners the Big Society means working better with the voluntary and community organisations that already support local groups. The voluntary and community sector must be given an opportunity to support more local development by communities. Business also needs to be encouraged to support their communities.

Partners commented on the need for these often countywide organisations to provide local support which communities could access.

Question 2:
**What would it look like – in Kent, a district, a neighbourhood,
to a resident?**

- **Active and engaged communities**
- **A shared purpose binding communities together**
- **Fostering collaborative cross sector working**
- **Streamlined and effective joint working**

Active and engaged communities

The Big Society would reflect the needs of local communities and so would look very different across Kent. However, essentially all communities would be empowered and all people given an opportunity to be involved and have a say.

This empowerment would range from local communities having an opinion on the services they receive to people delivering the local service themselves. With this empowerment people should be able to influence the matters which affect them. They should have a choice and their decision count.

‘Opportunities for people to influence matters that affect them’

The Big Society concept also involves citizens taking responsibility, this may be taking responsibility for their own actions or taking responsibility for reaching out to find out what their community needs.

A shared purpose binding communities together

Partners commented that the Big Society would be visible in the culture of communities. Neighbourhoods would be ‘at ease with themselves’ and residents would have a strong sense of place and attachment to their community.

It would be evidenced through personal relationships as well as larger service issues. Where communities come together for a shared purpose.

‘Big Society means individuals taking responsibility for reaching out to
find out what the community needs’

Fostering collaborative cross sector working

The strong sense of a shared purpose within communities would also be visible between public, private, and voluntary organisations. Where responsible relationships are based on local need and whether all sectors are able to play a role in supporting communities. At all levels of organisations and whether services are being delivered in communities or countywide the need of the individual should always be paramount.

Streamlined and effective joint working

A key improvement needed to support the Big Society is effective joint working to deliver a 'lean state not a mean state'.

This would involve a different way of working including agencies pooling budgets and knowledge, working in a place-orientated manner such as the Total Place model where needs are identified and targeted whilst duplication reduced. Moving away from long term projects and organisations fixed in buildings to flexible organisations and services and support tailored to need, 'working with' rather than 'doing to'. It would also involve building on current practices such as personalisation and individual care plans.

Question 3: What barriers and challenges do we need to address?

- **Securing involvement of the silent majority**
- **Retaining a focus on individual level need and choice**
- **Overcoming risk averse practices**
- **Tackling engrained and protective organisational silos**
- **Inflexible procurement practices**
- **Communicate in a way that others will understand**
- **Developing the Big Society at a time of deficit reduction**

Securing involvement of the silent majority

Partners identified a number of issues around engagement with citizens and promoting involvement.

It was felt that at the moment there was a relatively small group of local people prepared or able to get involved who are often self selected and self interested. A key issue is how to enable activists to represent the views of their neighbours and community rather than their own views.

‘How do we ensure that ‘Big Society’ is not dominated by self interested activists who might exclude others (the majorities) interest’

Partners thought difficulties would arise when trying to recruit a wider group of active responsible citizens and questioned whether people had the time, skills, capacity, and most importantly wanted to be involved. Partners raised issues including whether citizens know how much is spent on services, have an informed view on service priorities, and whether, if they did get involved, there would be sufficient reward or ‘payback’.

Partners also highlighted the difficulties in engaging with the ‘silent majority’, the need to engage at different levels district, neighbourhood, individual, and the perceived barriers to involvement of “real” communities.

It may be more difficult to kick-start the Big Society in areas where the greatest challenge and needs are. Some of these areas have the least capacity to initiate Big Society projects.

Retaining a focus on individual level need and choice

The Big Society essentially operates at an individual level through individual involvement and choice. The challenge comes in how to coalesce all the different priorities within a community, engaging those who are

disenfranchised (long term unemployed and unskilled), whilst not turning the Big Society into a professional services driven approach whereby the community agenda is defined and imposed externally.

Overcoming risk averse practices

Partners identified a number of issues related to working practices which could prevent a Big Society, such as overbearing bureaucracy, health and safety and avoidance of risk.

Partners agreed there was a need to overcome those practices that stifle community activism such as excessive risk management, overbearing red tape, limiting regulations over issues such as information sharing, and a reluctance by some organisations to let go of control. Whilst at the same time partners commented on England having developed a 'liability culture' which made people reluctant to get involved. Essentially individuals and communities need to be given the freedom to achieve and supported in this through service providers thinking differently whilst understanding there will be a risk of failure.

'Empowering people in loose structures feels uncomfortable to us especially when we have been used to prescribed standards and a relentless focus on performance'

Tackling engrained and protective organisational silos

During the discussions partners commented on the current cultures within both organisations and communities which seek to protect vested interests and could hamper a Big Society. These included the risk of retrenchment into organisations or silos within organisations which would hinder the fostering of a big society. It was felt that organisations needed to operate in a more open, transparent and willing way, taking time to build trust and confidence, and engage in a spirit of cooperation. This would ensure that individuals and communities have enough awareness of services to make meaningful decisions.

Inflexible procurement practices

The large size and operation of the many public sector contracts prohibits many small companies and the voluntary and community sector from bidding. Smaller VCS organisations in particular do not have the infrastructure, capacity or financial reserves to bid. This will be a barrier to the diversification of service provision through such models as co-operatives, mutuals and social enterprises.

Communicate in a way that others will understand

Communication was highlighted as a key barrier to the big society limiting both community engagement and cross-sector working.

A key concern was the professional language being used which is in danger of stigmatising certain communities such as being labelled 'deprived'. It was felt there is a need to change our language and adopt a 'the glass is half full' approach.

'The language we use puts up barriers to communities participating and working with us'

It is also vital for organisations to adopt different styles and methods of communicating. Localist approaches to communication will have to develop in a tailored manner.

Developing the Big Society at a time of deficit reduction

A number of partners commented that the Big Society would not be cost neutral and a major barrier to achieving a bigger society would be financial.

There are concerns over finance at both national and local levels. Will the measures in the Comprehensive Spending Review hinder the delivery of the Big Society and, within Kent, what will be the impact on budget reductions?

At the time when demand is increasing on many VCS organisations there is a risk of a double whammy with expectations of the VCS to deliver more at the same time as funding becomes more difficult.

Question 4: What are the opportunities to work together to shape it?

- Capitalise upon the potential of the citizen
- Realising the full potential of the skills and networks of the VCS
- Additional support of the private sector
- Providing effective leadership through local elected Members
- Building on best practice that exists in Kent
- Making procurement more accessible to the VCS
- Modernising and sharing finance management and support
- Seizing the opportunities of the public service reform

Capitalise upon the potential of the Citizen

It was agreed that enabling and empowering citizens is crucial for the big society to be effective.

Partners identified a number of opportunities for developing this engagement including fostering local determination, creating the conditions where co-production can flourish, and developing the understanding and power of citizens so they can make informed decisions about services.

There should be 'no decision about me without me'
(Health White Paper)

These can be achieved through building on current local groups for their expertise and knowledge, promoting traditional mechanisms such as Parish Councils and school governing bodies, improved linkage with local people to support what they need, developing communication methods including promoting successes through local press and communicating on people's level using language they understand and mediums they use such as text and Facebook. There is a vital need to make engagement simple to allow local people to take on responsibilities.

There is also a need for public services to accept more risk, to allow people to do more things for their community with less restrictions.

Realising the full potential of the skills and networks of the VCS

There are many areas of the voluntary and community sector which are well established such as the faith sector. These networks are often under utilised. There are huge opportunities to build on what is already there in terms of VCS groups, forums, and arrangements such as VCS groups acting as 'mentors' to upcoming community groups, or voluntary sector groups coming together to share resources, deliver services and create economies of scale.

‘Opportunity to use skills and networks currently in the VCS to ‘mentor’ upcoming community groups’

Additional support of the private sector

Some businesses already support communities and many enlightened companies exercise ‘corporate social responsibility’ in many ways, including sponsoring community projects and supporting staff in volunteering. Equally the private sector has much to gain from the Big Society. Individual employees having a high quality of life, living in vibrant communities will be better motivated.

There is scope for more businesses to contribute to their communities including additional support to the VCS and by attracting benefactors and philanthropy within Kent.

Providing effective leadership through local elected Members

There are important opportunities for maximising the role and use of elected representatives across parish, town, borough and county levels. Elected Members have the chance to act as community champions offering both vision and support and work within their communities.

However it is vital that leadership ‘listens’ and ‘enables’ rather than reverts to ‘telling’ or ‘doing to’. The Big Society is an opportunity to develop leaders from within communities who represent their needs.

‘Provide leadership to seed ideas and provide tools – but DON’T automatically default to doing it for people’

Building on best practice that exists in Kent

Kent has been working in a ‘Big Society’ way for many years and there are numerous best practice examples which can be built on or learnt from. Success breeds success. There are opportunities to harness the talents and share the expertise and resources Kent has developed to move forward and support communities.

A number of the projects discussed were Margate Task Force, SILK projects, and Housing Association initiatives.

‘Use good examples as testimonials – Success breeds success’

Making procurement more accessible to VCS

There are also opportunities to radically alter the way the public sector funds voluntary sector services with moves away from grants towards a commissioning approach.

Different models of procurement, either directly with the VCS or with the VCS via a 'partner' in a private sector need to be explored. This will encourage the development of new delivery vehicles such as Community Interest Companies. A pre-requisite may need to be supporting the VCS so it has the infrastructure and confidence to participate in this more ambitious way.

Seizing the opportunities of the public service reform

The budget reductions will mean that every agency will need to question what it provides and in many cases to stop doing some things. This provides an opportunity to dismantle existing approaches for delivery.

Numerous opportunities were highlighted in terms of improving or developing ways of working and building on the current reforms such as in health and education which are taking place across the public, private and voluntary sectors.

A number of partners highlighted the benefits of joined up working across sectors and services with an open, transparent and honest relationship focused on a shared purpose. Workers in other different sectors can act as 'co-workers' and some back-office support across all three sectors can come together to share learning and development. This approach could also help streamline front-line working by reducing the number of agencies involved with particular families.

It was noted that the state has a role as facilitator for the big society but so too have the VCS, private companies and local community leaders.

Section 7. Next Steps

It is hoped this report will be used by all partners as a foundation on which to build their future policy and delivery work around the Big Society agenda.

The report will be presented at the Kent Partnership Annual Conference on 18th November 2010 and will feed into the discussions on how to take forward the Big Society agenda in Kent and how this should be reflected in the refreshed Vision for Kent, Kent's Sustainable Community Strategy.

Appendix 1

Attendees - Kent Partnership Board, 12 October 2010

Chair:

Peregrine Massey, High Sheriff of Kent

Presenters:

Bishop Trevor Willmott - Bishop in Canterbury

Jonathan Shaw - Former Minister for the South East

Gurvinder Sandher - Director, Kent Equality Cohesion Council

Kent Partnership Board members:

Name	Title/ Organisation
Malcolm Barry	Chairman, Kent CAN
Andrew Bowles	Leader - Swale Borough Council/Chairman, Swale LSP
Roy Bullock	Leader, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council/Chairman, Tunbridge Wells LSP
Jenny Donovan	Environment Agency
Claudia Chambers	Natural England
Marion Dinwoodie	Interim Chief Executive, NHS West Kent
Peter Fleming	Leader, Sevenoaks District Council/Chairman, Sevenoaks LSP
Christopher Garland	Leader, Maidstone Borough Council/Chairman Maidstone LSP
Charlie Hendry	Chief Fire Officer, Kent Fire & Rescue Service/ <i>Chairman, Safer & Stronger Communities Group</i>
Jo James	Chief Executive, Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce
Kevin Lynes	Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Economic Development, KCC
Megan McKibbin	Executive Director, Kent Economic Board
Geoff Miles	Chairman, Kent Economic Board
Meradin Peachey	Director of Public Health, KCC/NHS/ <i>Chairman, Kent Public Health Board</i>
Gurvinder Sandher	Kent Equality Cohesion Council
Caroline Shaw	Voluntary Action Within Kent
Mike Snelling	Leader, Gravesham Borough Council/Chairman, Dartford & Gravesham LSP
Ann Sutton	Chief Executive, NHS Eastern & Coastal Kent
Rosalind Turner	Managing Director, Children Families & Education, KCC
Nigel Whitburn	Kent Association of Local Councils
Bishop Trevor Willmott	Bishop in Canterbury/Churches Together in Kent
Sir Robert Worcester	Founder, MORI and Chancellor, University of Kent
Mark Worrall	Leader, Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council/Chairman, Tonbridge & Malling LSP

Additional attendees:

Name	Title/ Organisation
Joy Ackroyd	Kent Children's Trust Partnership Manager
Clive Bainbridge	Director of Community Safety and Regulatory Services, Kent County Council
Emma Barrett	Social Innovation Lab Kent
Lesley Bowles	Sevenoaks LSP / Sevenoaks District Council
Steve Charman	Senior Community Engagement Manager, Kent County Council
David Coleman	Kent Association of Local Councils
Zena Cooke	Maidstone LSP / Maidstone Borough Council
Caroline Davis	NHS East Kent
Judy Doherty	Policy Manager, Communities, Kent County Council
Jay Edwins	NHS West Kent
Debra Exall	Head of Strategic Policy, Kent County Council
Ross Gill	Economic Policy and Strategy Manager, Kent County Council
Wayne Gough	Interim County Manager (Supporting Independence Programme,) Kent County Council
Steve Griffiths	Kent Fire and Rescue Services
Noel Hatch	Technology, Research and Transformation Team, Kent County Council
Amanda Honey	Managing Director, Communities, Kent County Council
Neil Jerome	Chief Superintendent, Kent Police
Carol Kincaid	County Co-ordinator, Kent Volunteers, Kent County Council
Mark Lemon	Head of Policy, Public Health, Kent County Council
Christine Locke	Diversity House
Claire Martin	Head of Supporting People, Kent County Council
Louise Matthews	Swale LSP / Swale Borough Council
Keith Morris	Chief Executive, Kent CAN
Jo Pannell	Senior Community Engagement Manager, Kent County Council
Edward Thomas	Policy Officer, Kent County Council
Janice Wason	East Kent LSP
Sarah Williams	Chair of Kent Partners Compact
Sara Woodward	Margate Task Force
Mandy Wynne	Chair of Kent and Medway Infrastructure Partnership

In support:

Graeme Brown - Kent Partnership Manager

David Firth - Partnership Officer