

The Big Society - the evidence base: version 1

This is a living document, and we need your help to make it better. Please leave any comments or sources of further evidence in [the online version](#). This is version 1 - published on 15th July 2010.

Background

The programme [Building the Big Society](#) was the first major policy announcement of the new coalition government on 18 May 2010. Since then, there has been much speculation as to what the Big Society actually means, as the increasing number of [articles and blog-posts](#) testifies.

Building on David Kane's blog-post on [the numbers behind the Big Society](#), the NCVO research team is keen to explore in greater depth the evidence behind this important policy agenda which emphasises the need to transform the relationship between citizens and the state.

Aims and objectives

This document aims to bring together some of the key evidence sources on the Big Society, in order to inform the debate and contribute to current thinking about how the different dimensions of the agenda might be taken forward.

We realise that the Big Society agenda potentially covers a very broad range of topics, and that our evidence review is unlikely to be comprehensive (particularly as we wanted to publish a review relatively quickly). To make it more manageable we have, at this stage, decided to focus on the five themes in the document [Building the Big Society](#). This document provides a brief outline of the policies on which the government have agreed:

- [Give communities more powers](#)
- [Encourage people to take an active role in their communities](#)
- [Transfer power from central to local government](#)
- [Support co-ops, mutuals, charities and social enterprises](#)
- [Publish government data](#)

We need your help

We see this document very much as a 'living document' which will be constantly updated with additional sources and analysis. We would like this document to be as collaborative as possible, so please feel free to comment on what we've done and provide links to additional sources of evidence that we should include.

In addition to the content here, we have published the review as [an online resource](#). Our intention is to revise both the document and the online version at regular intervals as collaborators add content or suggest revisions. Any subsequent versions of the document will acknowledge these contributions.

You can also see the tables behind all the evidence in these pages in [a Google spreadsheet](#).

Give communities more powers

What's the policy?

Give communities more powers

1. *"We will radically reform the planning system to give neighbourhoods far more ability to determine the shape of the places in which their inhabitants live.*
2. *We will introduce new powers to help communities save local facilities and services threatened with closure, and give communities the right to bid to take over local state-run services.*
3. *We will train a new generation of community organisers and support the creation of neighbourhood groups across the UK, especially in the most deprived areas."* (Building the Big Society, Cabinet Office).

What's the evidence?

1. How do people feel about their neighbourhood?

How people feel about the neighbourhood they live in will be one of the many factors to influence their decision to get involved at the neighbourhood level.

According to the [Citizenship Survey report on community cohesion](#), most people (77%) feel that they belong strongly to their neighbourhood. However, people's feelings of belonging seem to vary depending on affluence, with those living in the more affluent areas generally having more positive attitudes towards their neighbourhood.

People in the 10% least deprived areas were more likely than those in the 10% most deprived areas (83% compared to 70%) to strongly belong to their neighbourhood. Similarly, those in the least deprived areas were more likely to enjoy living in their neighbourhood (77% compared to 47%) and agreed that people who lived there would pull together to improve it (78% compared to 51%). This evidence might suggest that building engagement in more deprived areas will be more difficult.

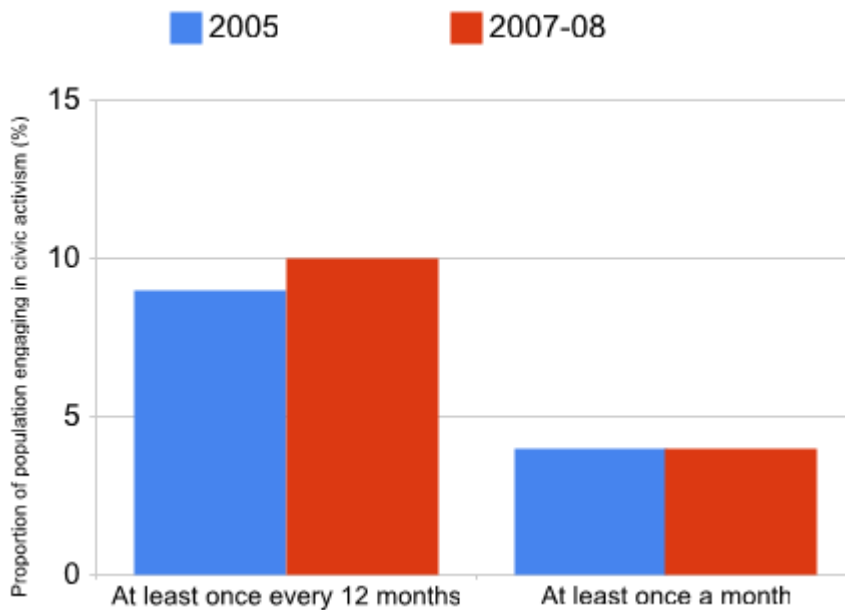
Importantly, people who felt that they could influence decisions affecting their local area were more likely to have a strong sense of belonging to their neighbourhood (82% compared with 74% for those who didn't), definitely enjoy living there (74% compared with 62%) and agree that people in their neighbourhood would pull together to improve it (78% compared to 59%). This might imply that a greater role for voluntary and community organisations in local governance could strengthen people's sense of belonging.

2a. Who is involved in decision-making about local services?

In the [Citizenship Survey report on community empowerment](#) 'civic activism' includes activities such as undertaking specific responsibilities in the community (like being a councillor, a school governor, a magistrate or a special constable) and involvement in groups which have a decision-making role in local services.

Using this definition, according to the survey, 10% of people in England were involved in some form of civic activism over the previous 12 months (compared to 43% who said they had formally volunteered over the same period). Only 4% were involved at least once a month (compared to 27% who said they had formally volunteered).

Participation in civic activism, 2005 and 2007/08



Source: CLG - *Citizenship Survey report on community empowerment (pdf)*, Table 59

The most common forms of civic activism involved joining a group concerned with services for young people (25% of ‘civic activism’ participants), tenants’ committees (20%) and local regeneration groups (19%).

People more likely to engage in civic activism were:

- People who were economically inactive* (compared to those in employment)
- People who had three or more close friends (compared to people with no close friends).
- People who lived in a rural area (compared to people who live in an urban area).
- People who had lived in the area for five years or more (compared to people who have lived in the area for less than a year).

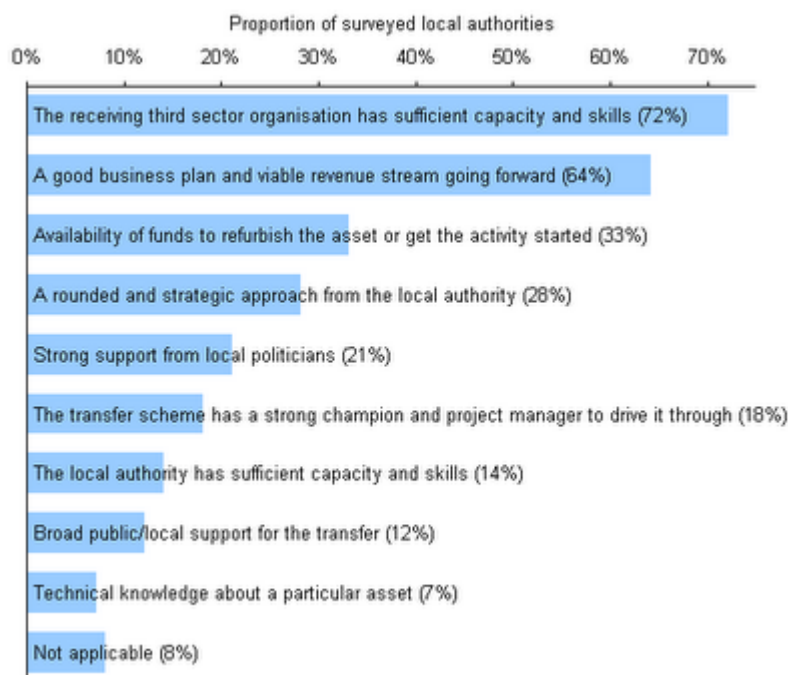
**due to being either retired, a student, looking after family/home or having a long-term illness or disability*

2b. What does asset transfer activity look like?

The [Asset Transfer Unit Evaluation Baseline Report](#) for the Development Trusts Association indicates that over the period 2007-2009 local authorities have transferred or were in the process of transferring assets mostly to charities (26%), social enterprises (11%), and community interest communities (10%). A small number of transfers have also been made to development trusts (4%), industrial/provident societies (1%), credit unions (less than 1%) and co-operatives (also less than 1%).

There is a huge diversity of assets being transferred, but the most common types of assets are by far community centres (34%) and parks or playing fields (16%). Almost the totality (93%) of the current asset transfer projects were reported to be in urban areas and only 10% in deprived areas.

Critical success factors in sustainable and successful asset transfers



Source: Development Trusts Association - [Asset Transfer Unit Evaluation](#) (pdf), Figure 2-6

The two most important success factors in undertaking successful and sustainable asset transfer were considered to be *'the receiving third sector organisation having sufficient skills and capacity'* (72%) and *'a good business plan and a viable revenue stream going forward'* (66%).

The [Development Trusts Association's member survey 2009](#) indicates that its 466 members held £565 million of assets in community ownership in 2009 representing a 15% rise from last year. They employed 5,400 people and worked with 16,000 volunteers.

3. Who supports neighbourhood groups?

In March 2010, the Conservatives announced plans to create *'neighbourhood army'* of 5,000 full-time professional community organisers who will *'identify local community leaders, bring communities together, help people start their own neighbourhood groups, and give communities the help they need to take control and tackle their problems'*.

The most often quoted example of community organising in the UK is [London Citizens](#), a 150-member alliance of faith congregations, trade unions, schools and community groups campaigning on a range of issues including undocumented migrants, the living wage, safer streets, community land trusts, and a cap on interest rates combined with the expansion of credit unions.

Community development workers also support neighbourhood groups at the grassroots level. According to the [Survey of Community Development Workers and Managers](#), community development workers are to be found mostly in the voluntary and community sector (39%) and in local government (25%).

Respondents' roles are funded primarily by the local authority (35%), central government (15%) or regional/regeneration development funds (8%). Other funders are charities, trusts

and the private sector. Just under a fifth (18%) of community development workers surveyed are volunteers, and just over half (51%) have been volunteering for ten years or more.

The main barriers facing community development workers highlighted by survey respondents are lack of funding (62%), working to other political or/and policy agendas that conflict with community development principles and values (48%), and working on short-term contracts or project funding (41%).

What are the potential challenges and opportunities?

Opportunities

- Many people express what local issues are important to them through existing community groups and voluntary organisations.
- Voluntary and community organisations also contribute to strengthening links within and between communities.
- Community development workers already operating at the neighbourhood level can provide the support needed for future initiatives.

Challenges

- Current levels of engagement for 'civic activism' are very low, especially engagement in regular 'civic activism' – the type of commitment needed when running local services.
- The type of participation needed to undertake successful and sustainable asset transfer and run effective services is sophisticated and resource intensive – it requires specific skills, commitment over time and funding.

References

- [CDF \(2009\) Survey of Community Development Workers and Managers.](#)
- [CLG \(2009\) 2007-08 Citizenship Survey: Community Cohesion Topic Report](#)
- [CLG \(2009\) 2007-08 Citizenship Survey: Empowered Communities Topic Report](#)
- [Development Trusts Association \(2009\) Development Trusts in 2009](#)
- [SQW Consulting \(2009\) Asset Transfer Unit Evaluation Baseline Report for the Development Trusts Association](#)

Additional areas to explore

- The relationship between neighbourliness and social capital.
- Community-led parish planning in rural areas.
- Impact of current local governance structures and processes on community activism.

Encourage participation

What's the policy?

Encourage people to take an active role in their communities

1. "We will take a range of measures to encourage volunteering and involvement in social action, including launching a national 'Big Society Day' and making regular community involvement a key element of civil service staff appraisals.
2. We will take a range of measures to encourage charitable giving and philanthropy.
3. We will introduce a National Citizen Service. The initial flagship project will provide a programme for 16 year olds to give them a chance to develop the skills needed to be active and responsible citizens, mix with people from different backgrounds, and start getting involved in their communities." (Building the Big Society, Cabinet Office)

What's the evidence?

1a. What are the main trends in volunteering?

Volunteering levels – both formal and informal – have fluctuated remarkably little over the last 20 years. The table below shows the number of people who formally volunteered at least once a year and informally volunteered at least once a year between 1981 and 2009.

Volunteering in England and Wales, 1981 to 2009

% undertaking formal and informal volunteering	<u>1981</u>	<u>1991</u>	<u>1997</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2003</u>	<u>2005</u>	<u>2007-08</u>	<u>2008-09</u>
Formal voluntary activity in past 12 months (%)	44	51	48	39	42	44	43	41
Formal voluntary activity at least once a month (%)	-	-	-	27	28	29	27	26
Informal voluntary activity in past 12 months (%)	62	76	74	67	62	68	64	62
Informal voluntary activity at least once a month (%)	-	-	-	34	37	37	35	35

Source: *Citizenship Survey and National Survey of Volunteering* (click year for source pdf)

According to the latest [UK Civil Society Almanac](#), if the proportion of adults who formally volunteer at least once a year was applied to the total adult population, the number of formal volunteers in the last twelve months in England is estimated to be 17.1 million. The [Citizenship Survey report on volunteering and charitable giving](#) indicates that people who regularly took part in formal volunteering (i.e. at least once a month) in 2008-09 spent an average of 12.6 hours volunteering in the four weeks before the survey interview.

The [Pathways through Participation literature review](#) notes that typical formal volunteers are women, of higher social grades, in managerial positions, degree educated, and middle aged. There are, however, differences across different types of formal volunteering.

1b. What are the benefits of employer-supported volunteering?

Based on the survey [Helping Out](#), the [IVR research bulletin on employer-supported volunteering](#) highlights that 2006-07 36% of current employees had an employer-supported

volunteering (ESV) scheme available to them. Public sector employees had access to an ESV scheme more frequently than private sector employees (45% compared to 30%). The most common model for ESV schemes was for employers to support staff to volunteer in their own time (33%). However, 27% indicated that their employer gave them paid time off to volunteer and 17% were given flexi-time to cover the hours spent.

A [recent survey carried out by reed.co.uk](#) of over 500 recruiters and over 3,000 jobseekers across the UK found that 84% of employers understand that volunteering can add skills to their workforce, 70% feel that employee volunteering enhances the community profile of their company and 77% know that building good relations with their communities is important. However half admit thinking that their employees fear asking them for paid time off to volunteer.

1c. What might the impact of a Big Society Day be?

The impact of the Big Society Day may depend on whether it is a bank holiday or not. Great Britain currently has 8 bank holidays, compared to an EU average of 10.9 days. NCVO, the TUC, CSV, Volunteering England and NAVCA have been campaigning for a [Community Day](#) dedicated to communities and volunteering for [over three years](#). Opinion differs on the costs and benefits of an additional bank holiday ('Community Day' or 'Big Society Day').

The [TUC estimates](#) that if 10% of the population took an active role in Community Day, the 'on the day' effect of greater community activity would be worth £250 million (based on 5 million people doing 5 hours work at a value of £10 per hour). The [CBI estimated](#) that an additional bank holiday could cost up to £6 million, although this counts lost work days and does not take into account increased expenditure on sectors such as recreation and culture, restaurants and hotels and travel that are likely to benefit from increased trading associated with bank holidays.

2. What are the main trends in charitable giving and philanthropy?

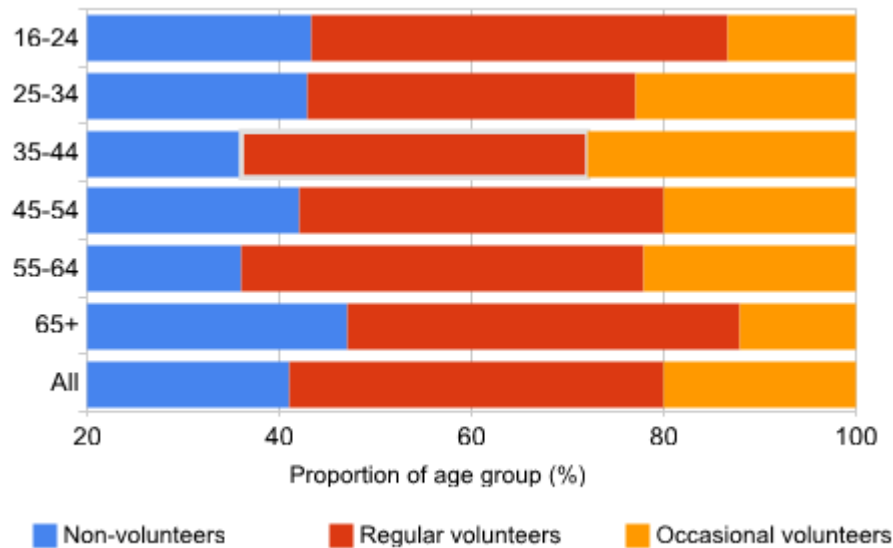
The [NCVO/CAF UK Giving 2009 report](#) indicates that a majority of adults in the UK gave to charity in 2008-09. In a typical month 54% donated, the equivalent to 26.9 million adult. The average donation in 2008-09 was £31 per donor and the median donation £10.

A small number of donors continue to generate a large proportion of the total amount donated. In 2008/09, 2 million people (7% of donors) gave more than £100 per month, but these donors generated almost half (49%) of the total amount given to charity. Overall in 2008/09, 58% of women gave to charity compared to 49% of men. Within all age groups women were more likely to donate than men.

3. How do young people participate?

The [IVR research bulletin on young people volunteering and giving](#) highlights that 57% of all young people (aged 16 to 24) surveyed had formally volunteered in some way over the previous year; 43% of young people were regular volunteers, helping out more than once a month, and 13% were occasional volunteers, helping out less than once a month.

Extent of formal volunteering, by age



Source: IVR - [Young people help out](#) (pdf), Table 1

In the [Helping Out survey](#), young people were the age group most likely to say that they got involved in volunteering to help them get on in their careers. They were also most likely to mention wanting to gain new skills from their volunteering.

Costs for National Citizen Service pilots based on development work so far and [pilot programmes](#) for the Citizen Service in London, Wales and the North West are estimated to be £13 million in 2011 and £37 million in 2012. Funding of £50 million diverted from PREVENT will pay for most of this.

What are the potential challenges and opportunities?

Opportunities

- A considerable number of people are already volunteering or/and giving money to charitable causes. They present a good base to build on.
- Existing community groups and voluntary organisations have the potential to appeal to a wide range of people because they are hugely diverse.
- There is a wealth of knowledge amongst volunteer managers and volunteer-involving organisations that can inform future policies.

Challenges

- Measures to encourage participation need to be based on a good understanding of how people actually want to engage - what makes them tick.
- Participation is often not inclusive - how can we ensure that participation does not reinforce inequalities?

References

- [Cabinet Office \(2007\) Helping Out: a national survey of volunteering and charitable giving](#)
- [CLG \(2010\) 2008-09 Citizenship Survey: Volunteering and Charitable Giving Topic Report](#)
- [DCLG \(2006\) 2005 Citizenship Survey Active Communities Topic Report](#)
- [DCLG \(2009\) 2007-08 Citizenship Survey: Volunteering and Charitable Giving Topic Report](#)
- [Home Office \(2003\) 2001 Home Office Citizenship Survey: People, Families and Communities](#)
- [Home Office \(2004\) 2003 Home Office Citizenship Survey: People, Families and Communities](#)
- [IVR \(1997\) 1997 National Survey of Volunteering in the UK \(summary\)](#)
- [IVR \(2008\) Caring companies: engagement in employer-supported volunteering](#)
- [IVR \(2008\) Young people help out: volunteering and giving among young people](#)
- [NCVO/CAF \(2009\) UK Giving 2009](#)
- [NCVO \(2010\) The UK Civil Society Almanac 2010](#)
- [Pathways through Participation \(2010\) Understanding participation: a literature review](#)

Additional areas to explore

- Impact of major volunteering programmes.
- Motivations for volunteering.
- Link between volunteering and giving.
- Youth participation beyond volunteering schemes.

Transfer power

What's the policy?

Transfer power from central to local government

1. *"We will promote the radical devolution of power and greater financial autonomy to local government, including a full review of local government finance.*
2. *We will give councils a general power of competence.*
3. *We will abolish Regional Spatial Strategies and return decision-making powers on housing and planning to local councils."* (Building the Big Society, Cabinet Office)

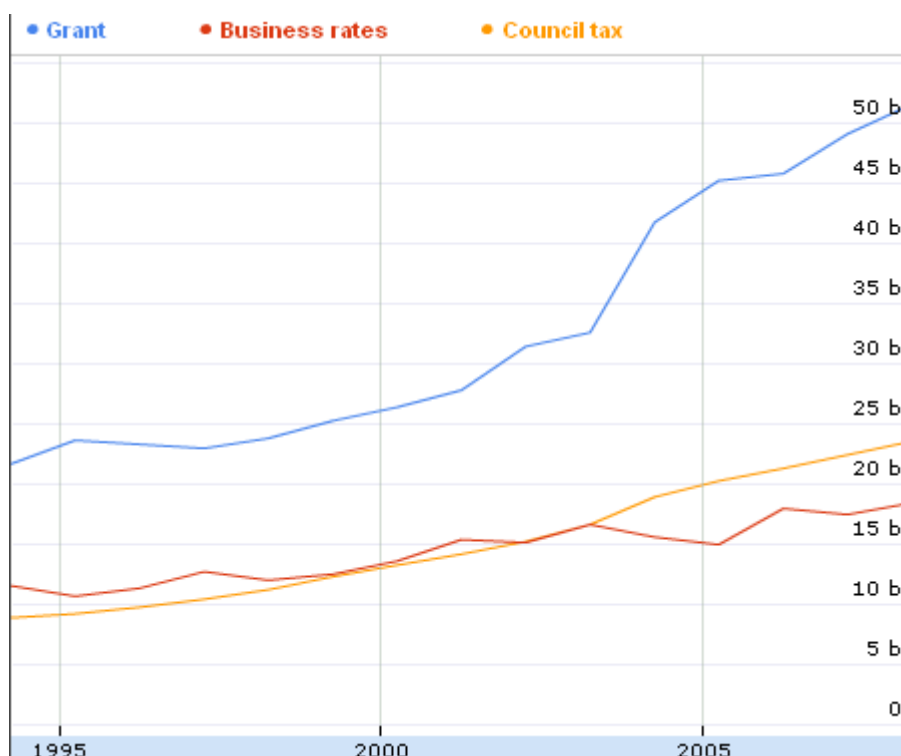
What's the evidence?

1a. How is local government financed?

The latest [Local Government Financial Statistics](#) report released on 25 June 2010 shows that in England local authorities' total expenditure, which represents about a quarter (26%) of all public expenditure, was £160 billion in 2008-09. About 60% of local authorities' gross income in 2008-09 came from central government (through revenue and capital grants or re-distributed non-domestic rates). The remaining 40% came from local sources including council tax, sales, fees and charges, council rents and capital receipts. In 2008-09, net current expenditure on general services was £113.1 billion. Total capital expenditure was £19.8 billion. The largest share of net current expenditure in 2008-09 was on education services with 37% of the total. Social services accounted for a further 17%, housing (excluding Housing Revenue Account) 15% and police 10%.

Longer-term trends in local authority revenue expenditure and how it has been financed since 1993-94 are shown in the table below:

Local Government finance since 1993-94 (£ billion)



Source: [Communities and Local Government](#)

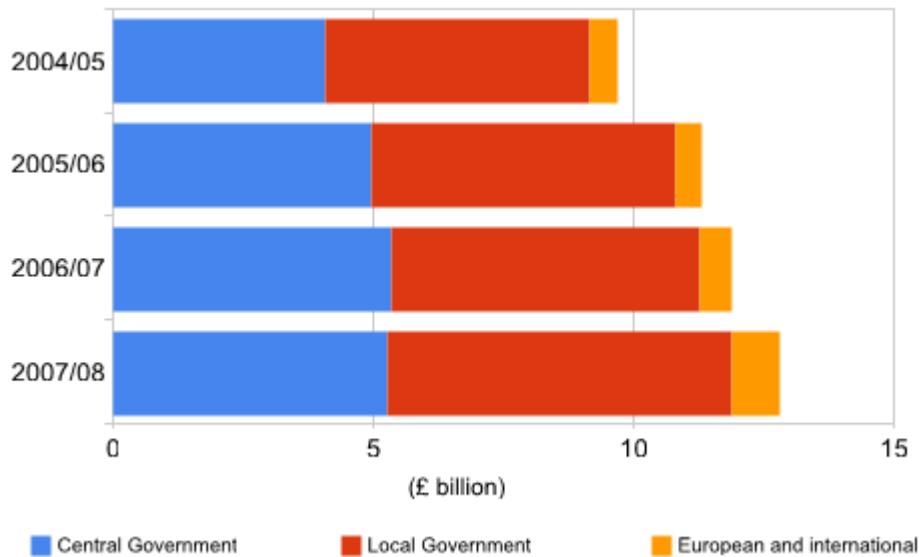
1b. How will the cuts in public spending affect local government finance?

On 10 June 2010, it was announced that [local government grants](#) would be reduced by approximately £1.2 billion, of which £359 million will come from the local Communities and Local Government Department, £311 million from the Department of Education and £309 million from the Department of Transport. It was also announced that government would be reducing revenue and capital non-schools ring-fencing this year from 10.7% (£4.5bn) to 7.7% (£3.2bn) to enable councils more flexibility and freedom over decisions on spending priorities and on where funding cuts might be implemented.

1c. How will this impact on the voluntary and community sector?

According to [Office of the Third Sector's National Survey of Third Sector Organisations](#) nearly a third (32%) of voluntary and community organisations receive funding from local government. The report 'The state and the voluntary sector' estimates that the income from local government provides the largest source of statutory income (47%) to the UK voluntary sector, so cuts in local authorities' budgets are most certainly going to impact on voluntary and community organisations. NCVO's ['crowdsourcing the cuts'](#) spreadsheet shows that some voluntary and community organisations are already experiencing cuts by their local authority. The impact will be felt more severely in deprived areas as the National Survey of Third Sector Organisations shows that voluntary and community organisations located in the most deprived areas are the ones most likely to be the recipients of local government funding.

Statutory funding of the UK voluntary sector



Source: NCVO - [UK Civil Society Almanac 2010](#)

What are the potential challenges and opportunities?

Opportunities

- Devolving power to the local level will help strengthen local democracy.
- Strengthening the powers of local authorities should enable them to better respond to local needs. Voluntary and community organisations can help ensure that the full range of voices in the community are heard.

Challenges

- Local authorities will need to review their spending priorities in view of the cuts that have been announced. Will they be able to meet their statutory obligations and continue funding the work of voluntary and community organisations with longer-term and softer outcomes?
- Many voluntary and community organisations that have spent much time and energy engaging with existing governance structures and building strategic relationships at local and regional levels may need to start again.
- Greater decentralisation may lead to greater differences between the levels of service provision available in different areas.

References

- [Cabinet Office \(2009\) Office of the Third Sector's National Survey of Third Sector Organisations](#)
- [CLG \(2010\) Local Government Financial Statistics England](#)

Additional areas to explore

- Participatory budgeting
- Referendums

Support organisations

What's the policy?

Support co-ops, mutuals, charities and social enterprises

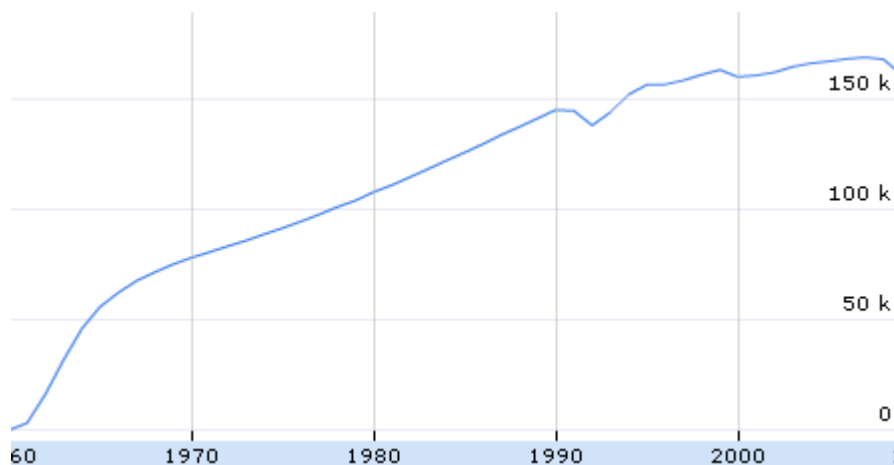
1. *"We will support the creation and expansion of mutuals, co-operatives, charities and social enterprises, and support these groups to have much greater involvement in the running of public services.*
2. *We will give public sector workers a new right to form employee-owned co-operatives and bid to take over the services they deliver. This will empower millions of public sector workers to become their own boss and help them to deliver better services.*
3. *We will use funds from dormant bank accounts to establish a Big Society Bank, which will provide new finance for neighbourhood groups, charities, social enterprises and other nongovernmental bodies."* (Building the Big Society, Cabinet Office)

What's the evidence?

1a. How many co-ops, mutuals, charities and social enterprises might need support?

According to the [UK Civil Society Almanac](#), there were 171,100 general charities in the UK in 2007-08, an increase of 6,919 organisations since the previous year. The income of these general charities amounted to £35.5 billion.

Registered charities in England and Wales, 1960-2009



Source: Charity Commission

There were 4,600 co-operatives in the UK in 2007/08. Co-operatives also experienced an increase in overall numbers, with an additional 185 organisations over the last year. The income of these co-operatives was £24.5 billion.

A number of organisation types can be defined as mutuals, including co-operatives. Other mutual organisations include employee-owned businesses, NHS Foundation Trusts and housing associations (see table for further information). According to the [Mutuals Yearbook](#)

[2009](#), the mutual sector continued to grow in 2009 with overall revenues exceeding £98 billion (up from £84 billion in 2008). Membership of mutuals has also continued to expand.

The Mutual sector, 2009

Sector	Number	Members	Employees	Assets (£m)	Revenue (£m)
Building Societies	52	22,000,000	42,300	341,000	4,000
Friendly Societies	200	6,000,000	5,000	17,000	1,646
Mutual Insurers	14	3,288,366	12,932	60,999	2,715
Other Financial Mutuals	2	2,001,200	13,397	70,329	4,535
The Co-operative Sector	4,630	10,650,338	167,519	7,873	24,488
Co-operative Trust Schools	28				
Credit Unions	487	747,230	950	592	63
Employee Owned Businesses	200		110,000		25,000
Football Supporter Trusts	169	100,000	100	6	6
GP Co-ops and Mutuals	40		8,000		150
Housing Associations	2,000	6,000,000	151,330	57,000	11,580
Leisure Trusts	120		26,000		625
Clubs & Societies	11,600	7,000,000	20,000	220	463
NHS Foundation Trusts	115	1,500,000	398,196	17,790	22,770
Total	19,657	59,287,134	955,724	572,809	98,041

Source: *Mutuo* - the [Mutuals Yearbook 2009](#)

The [Social Enterprise Coalition](#) reports that social enterprises contribute £24 billion to the economy.

1b. What support is already being provided to these organisations?

Voluntary and community organisations, coops and mutuals and social enterprises receive support from a number of 'horizontal' (such as [NAVCA](#) or [DSC](#)) and 'vertical' (such as Children England) infrastructure bodies at national, local and regional levels.

Funding for this support comes from a range of sources, including the sector itself and government. The users or beneficiaries of this support are frequently not the purchasers or funders. This in turn highlights that support is financed through direct purchase, membership subscriptions and grants from a range of different funders. The Big Lottery Fund (via its [BASIS](#) stream) and [Capacitybuilders](#)' ChangeUp programme have been significant funders of support.

The [evaluation of the first phase of ChangeUp](#) (pdf) by the Third Sector Research Centre provides an indication of the level of support provided. Using [GuideStar UK](#) data, TSRC estimated that expenditure by approximately 1,200 National Infrastructure Organisations totalled £2.5 billion in 2008, equivalent to 8% of GuideStar's estimate for total third sector expenditure. In addition, 2,000 Local Infrastructure Organisations spent £700 million in 2008, or 2% of total spend by the third sector. We believe these estimates are based on a broad definition of infrastructure organisations.

1c. How do these organisations contribute to the delivery of public services?

The Mutuels Yearbook 2009 shows that mutuals, co-operatives, charities and social enterprises already undertake a wide range of public service delivery. Cooperatives work across the economy, including in the provision of affordable housing, children's nurseries and healthcare. Housing associations provide 2 million homes for 5 million people and have a turnover of £11.6 billion. The 122 NHS Foundation trusts (as at September 2009) cover acute and mental health services. The 115 that were registered by March 2009 had a turnover of £22.8 billion.

The UK Civil Society Almanac estimates that general charities received £12.8 billion from government in 2007-08, of this, £9.1 billion was in the form of a contract. Contract income from government to general charities has increased by £5.1 billion in seven years. Just over one-fifth of general charities (38,000 organisations) have a direct financial relationship with government. An organisation's size appears to impact on both the amount of statutory income that it receives and also how important that statutory income is to their overall income. 79% of the general charities statutory income is received by 3,742 large and major organisations. Alternatively, small and micro organisations receive only 3.3% of the statutory funding that is received by the sector.

Social enterprises work across a wide range of public service areas including delivering primary and community care services and employment services. A [survey by the SEC](#) found that organisations in the £250,001–£1 million turnover band were more likely to receive the majority of their income from the state (48%).

2. How common are employee-owned businesses?

There are approximately 200 employee-owned businesses with a combined annual turnover of £25 billion. There is no official data about the size of the co-owned business sector – companies in which employees own anything from a significant to controlling stake in the company – but the sector appears to be growing at a significant rate [add data]. Employee-owned businesses take many forms (e.g. cooperatives, mutuals, companies with Employee Share Ownership Plans (ESOPs)), so should not be thought of as a single business model.

What are the potential challenges and opportunities?

Opportunities

- Greater involvement of voluntary and community sector in the delivery of public services could lead to increased funding for some organisations, particularly the larger charities with a local presence.
- The opening up of markets may lead to a growing interest in the voluntary and community sector as innovators and transformers of public services.

Challenges

- For many organisations it may not be feasible or appropriate for them to be involved in the delivery of public services and doing so could lead to mission drift.
- More involvement in the delivery of public services could lead to voluntary and community organisations losing their identity and becoming more like public sector organisations.

References

- [Employee-ownership association \(2010\) The employee ownership effect: a review of the evidence](#)
- [Mutuo \(2009\) Mutuels Yearbook 2009](#)
- [NCVO \(2010\) UK Civil Society Almanac 2010](#)
- [Social Enterprise Coalition \(2009\) State of social enterprise survey 2009](#)

Additional areas to explore

- Innovation and the voluntary and community sector.
- Outcomes measurement of public service delivery.
- Loan finance in the voluntary and community sector.
- Attitudes to finance and risk.

Publish government data

What's the policy?

Publish Government Data

1. *"We will create a new 'right to data' so that government-held datasets can be requested and used by the public, and then published on a regular basis.*
2. *We will oblige the police to publish detailed local crime data statistics every month, so the public can get proper information about crime in their neighbourhoods and hold the police to account for their performance."* (Building the Big Society, Cabinet Office)

What's the evidence?

The Coalition's Programme for Government contained a [number of pledges](#) to make government more transparent, particularly in the area of the data that government holds. There are specific pledges to make available data on government workforce, central and local government spending, and contracting and tendering. But the Government also pledged a more general "right to data".

The process of opening up government data was begun under the previous government, and there have been a number of milestones along the way:

- **January 2005:** The full provisions of the [Freedom of Information Act 2000](#) come into force, creating a general right of access to information held by public authorities. Freedom of Information requests have since become an important part of journalism and civic activism, with the MPs expenses scandal probably the most high-profile FOI-related case.
- **September 2009:** [data.gov.uk](#) is launched by Gordon Brown and Sir Tim Berners-Lee, with the aim of encouraging the general public and web developers to re-use data the government holds.
- **April 2010:** After the ["Free our Data" campaign](#) by the Guardian newspaper, amongst others, the Ordnance Survey makes available limited map data for free re-use, as part of its [OpenData](#) programme.
- **June 2010:** The newly-formed Government [releases the COINS database](#) of central government expenditure. George Osborne later pledges that future releases of the data will be more user-friendly. The coalition have also acted quickly to get other datasets into the public domain, notably [central government workforce](#), [special advisors](#) and [highly-paid civil servants](#).

Future developments planned by the government include forcing local authorities to release details of all spending over £500, a register of lobbyists, the publication of contracts and, importantly, commitments to using open and standardised formats when publishing data.

Some examples of open data in action

It is difficult to quantify the impact that open government data has had so far, particularly at this early stage. However, there are a number of examples of citizens and organisations using

(and creating) public data to hold government to account and to create value for their communities.

- **FixMyStreet:** A [mySociety](#) website that allows citizens to report problems in their area (like potholes, graffiti and fly tipping) directly to the local council. The site keeps a log of all queries, so not only are they reported to the council, but other citizens can see where the issues in their area are.
- **Where does my money go?:** This site, run by the [Open Knowledge Foundation](#) shows how public money is spent, and informs debates about public spending in the UK. They have been at the forefront of efforts to gain access to the COINS database.
- **Open Councils:** [OpenlyLocal](#) have been [tracking councils that release open data](#), and seeing how many are truly open. At the time of writing, only five out of 434 councils are truly open ([by the definition they are using](#)), with another eight publishing open data. The four councils are: [Lichfield](#), [Salford](#), [Warwickshire](#), [East Staffordshire](#) and the [Greater London Authority](#). These councils are also sharing apps made using the data: [Warwickshire has gallery of applications](#), and so does [London](#).
- **Interactive Tube Maps:** a very powerful example of how an open data feed, in this case live London Underground tube information, can create simple applications that capture the imagination. The live tube map was created by [Matthew Somerville](#).
- **National Biodiversity Network:** charities and statutory bodies involved in wildlife and biodiversity have come together to share the information they collect on particular species throughout the UK. Citizens can see what species are active in their local areas, and organisations can collaborate on action and campaigning.
- **London Crime Mapping:** Following Boris Johnson's election as Mayor of London in 2008, the Metropolitan Police launched an online map showing crime in London Boroughs and Wards.
- **Subsidy Scope:** this US-based project tracks government spending on ad tax subsidies for non-profit organisations. The site also includes data from federal bailouts.

What are the potential challenges and opportunities?

Opportunities

- Open data will give charities new ways to find and share information on the need of their beneficiaries - who needs their services most and where they are located.
- Charities will be able to use the evidence found in open data to boost their campaigns and lobby government.
- Some voluntary sector organisations have been at the forefront of opening up data.

Challenges

- Many of the skills needed to create, access and use open data are not yet widespread in the voluntary sector.
- There is a cost to effectively creating and using this data, while sharing commercially sensitive data could reduce competitiveness.

- As open data becomes embedded in government, voluntary organisations which contract with government may be compelled to produce and share data as part of those contracts.

References

- Data.gov.uk
- Open Knowledge Foundation
- Podnosh

Additional areas to explore

- The costs of open data.
- Successes and failures of open data.