

Big Society - Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

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What's the idea?

The [Big Society](#) is about shifting the culture – from government action to local action. This is not about encouraging volunteering for the sake of it. This is about equipping people and organisations with the power and resources they need to make a real difference in their communities.

Throughout our communities there is a great appetite for involvement in local initiatives and people do want to make a difference in their area. What often stands in the way and takes the time is unnecessary bureaucracy – red tape, filling in countless forms.

Our focus will be on making it as easy as possible for civil society organisations to help shape and deliver our public services, making it easier to set up and run a civil society organisation and to get more resources to the sector.

What is the government doing to help?

The Office for Civil Society, part of the Cabinet Office, works across government departments to translate the Big Society agenda into practical policies, provides support to voluntary and community organisations. It is responsible for delivering a number of key Big Society programmes, including the Big Society Bank, National Citizen Service pilots, Community Organisers and the Community First fund.

We have also announced [a new taskforce](#), run jointly between Cabinet Office and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), which will look specifically at the issue of cutting red tape, and reducing the amount of regulation, monitoring and reporting imposed on charities, social enterprises and voluntary organisations.

In addition, we are committed to training 5000 Community Organisers across the country. These people will be there to facilitate local action and give support to groups looking to come together to tackle identified problems.

Our [National Citizen Service](#) programme for 16 year olds aims to instil this culture of active citizenship in our young people – giving them the 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. In addition we will also be encouraging social action by working on a national 'Day of Social Action' and making regular community involvement a key element of key civil service staff appraisals.

What is the aim of the Big Society?

The Big Society is about collective action and collective responsibility. We recognise that active local people can be better than state services at finding innovative and more efficient solutions to local problems. Tax-payers want better value for money, and the Big Society can deliver that.

Whether it is in building affordable housing, tackling youth unemployment, inviting charities to deliver public services we want communities to be part of the answer to the big social problems of our time.

Where is the Big Society making a difference?

There are already several areas including in [Eden Valley](#), one of the most sparsely populated parts of our country, [Liverpool](#), [Sutton](#) and [Windsor and Maidenhead](#) which are leading the way.

We are seeing lots of people coming forward in Cumbria to develop a community backed affordable housing scheme, and in Liverpool to build digital inclusion in poorer areas. The work underway here shows that communities, no matter what their background, all have unique and innovative solutions to offer and are interested in shaping their local area.

But this should just be the beginning. We would like to see the action taking place in these areas replicated across the whole country. We want other forward-thinking, entrepreneurial, community-minded people and neighbourhoods in our country to come forward and ask for the same freedoms and the same support.

What is the role of charities and other civil society organisations?

The sector has an important role in Big Society which is about taking power out of the hands of bureaucrats and giving it back to people so they can solve local problems themselves. We have already announced plans for a [Big Society Bank](#) which will use money from dormant bank accounts in England to increase the finance options available for social enterprises, charities and other groups. We are also developing plans to reduce the burdens of red-tape on charities and voluntary organisations and open up new opportunities for the sector to deliver public services.

We have been clear that local authorities should not target charities, social enterprises or voluntary and community groups as easy options for savings.

So how can we get involved?

People can start by thinking locally and asking themselves "What are the issues in my local area", "How could I work with others to tackle these issues?", or "What are the opportunities for my business/charity?"

One issue worth considering is our idea to promote the establishment of mutual and co-operative organisation among public sector workers: people who think they can do what they're currently doing in a better way. People can form themselves into a mutual, a co-operative, and bid to carry out public service work in the same kind of way that the four vanguard areas have produced community ideas.