

## Summary on a Page: June 2012

### Big Society Audit 2012

#### What is it?

The Big Society, launched in 2010, is the Government's vision of a society where individuals and communities have more power and responsibility, and use it to create better neighbourhoods and local services. This Audit is the first attempt to take a comprehensive look at what is currently happening, drawing together over forty different sources of data.

#### What does it say?

The Audit finds a genuine seam of public interest in community empowerment and high degrees of involvement in social action through giving and volunteering. The growing reach and influence of the voluntary sector is in striking contrast to the decline of public engagement with national political parties and trust in national politicians. If the Big Society is to succeed, the Government must do more to work with the voluntary sector to build a common vision and goals.

Far from being strengthened in the first two years of the Big Society, the voluntary sector is facing £3.3 billion of cuts in public funding up to 2016. Voluntary organisations working with disadvantaged groups in deprived areas are more likely to depend on statutory funding but local authorities with the highest levels of deprivation in England suffered the deepest cuts in spending in 2011-2012.

Despite various Government initiatives to stimulate new funding for the sector, the Audit concludes that extra funds from donations are unlikely to fill this funding hole, with levels of giving to charities by individuals already high.

The Audit found that small, local voluntary and community organisations find it hard to gain Government contracts, as tendering practices seem to have an implicit bias toward larger organisations, mainly in the private sector. For example, requirements in the Work Programme, described as a flagship Big Society programme, seemed to favour the private sector, which won 90 per cent of prime contracts in 2011.

#### **Other Audit findings include:**

- Over half of people think that change can happen by getting involved locally, compared to just 30 per cent nationally;
- Membership of the 3 main nature charities is 5 million, compared to only half a million people who are members of the 3 main political parties;
- 40 per cent of the population almost never trust British Governments to place the needs of the nation above their own party but 75 per cent of people think most charities are trustworthy;
- 60% of people donated to charity in the last month, 2nd in the world, but the UK was 21st out of 110 countries in its levels of volunteering.

#### **The report recommends that:**

- the Government should develop and deliver clear Big Society goals with key partners, including the voluntary and community sector, e.g. poverty reduction and ensuring equal life chances.
- Opportunities to deliver public services should avoid bias toward the private sector and ensure fair access to the voluntary sector.
- Central and local government should increase their understanding of how the voluntary and community sector works, including through interchange of staff, training and more joint initiatives.

#### Any implications?

An opportunity for the VCS to gain access to contracts and work more with the Government.

#### Key links:

 Read the full document: [Big Society Audit 2012](#).