

National Coalition for Independent Action

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Voluntary action under threat: what privatisation means for charities and community groups

1. This paper

National Coalition for Independent Action (NCIA) is a network of individuals and organisations who believe there is a need to defend independent voluntary and community activity. This summary paper gathers together evidence about the role of commissioning, localism and 'big society' in the government's wider agenda of privatisation.

2. The policy background

Before May 2010, voluntary and community organisations were already finding it difficult to respond to increased need for their services because of the recession. They are now having to contend with billions of pounds of government funding cuts.

Cuts to public services are an ideological decision, not a necessity. Economists including Nobel Prize winner Paul Krugman and former World Bank chief economist Joseph E Stiglitz have shown that cuts will be damaging to the growth of the economy.¹ The ideology behind the cuts is a commitment to the reduction or complete removal of the universal and equal right to healthcare, welfare benefits, education and other services. The combined effects of the government's cuts and its 'localism' agenda (of which the idea of 'big society' is part) will be reduced public and community services. A pattern is emerging which shows that the less privileged you are, the more the cuts will affect your life.² We are returning to an earlier time in British history, when poor people relied on the charity of the rich where they could get it.

¹ 'PCS on Privatisation' John Medhurst and Enrico Tortolano for the Public and Commercial Services Union, 2010 http://www.pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events/facts-about-civil-and-public-services/the-truth-about-privatisation.cfm

² 'The Big Society – the Evidence Base' NCVO, July 2010. http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/sites/default/files/The_Big_Society_-_the_evidence_base_0.pdf page 11/20

3. Commissioning: the destruction of the voluntary sector

What is commissioning?

'Commissioning' is used to mean the process whereby funders, usually statutory authorities, from local to European, pay for services from organisations, mostly through contracts. Many voluntary sector activities that used to be funded through grants are now commissioned.³ Voluntary sector organisations compete with each other and often also with the private sector to get the contract. For a local service, an organisation based in that community could be competing with a national or international organisation. Whereas with grant funding the organisation could put forward a proposal to deliver a service based on need it had identified, with commissioning the statutory authority decides what it wants the service to be and specifies resources available, outcomes expected and often, how the service or activity should be delivered. The most important consideration in comparing different possible providers for a commissioned service is usually cost.

This process began in the 1980s and was intended to make delivery of public services operate more like a market place. The current government intends to accelerate further the process of privatisation of public services through initiatives like the 'free schools' model and GP commissioning in the NHS.⁴ Its *Open Public Services* white paper expresses its vision for virtually all public services to be open to delivery by the voluntary and community sector and the private sector.⁵

The push towards privatisation of public services is not because this delivers the best service or the best value for money.⁶ The TUC reports that 'research by economists at Imperial College shows that, following the introduction of competition in the NHS in the 1990s, under a system that allowed hospitals to negotiate prices, there was a fall in clinical quality'⁷. The policy is the result of the government's ideological commitment to market principles and of lobbying from companies who stand to gain.

The market doesn't select the best service

Research by the Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisations found that 'commissioners do not have good awareness of the voluntary sector market.'⁸ If one bidder was cutting corners to save money to the point of being dangerous to people, it would not be the commissioner's job to pick up on it. The report finds that where commissioning does occur based on an understanding of local needs, with costs calculated accurately so that the

³ For example, Birmingham Council announced at the beginning of 2010 that all of its youth services, which were previously grant funded, would move to commissioning. See *Children and Young People Now* (<http://www.cypnow.co.uk/inDepth/ByDiscipline/Youth-Work/983925/Fears-grow-loss-grants/>)

⁴ More about Free schools: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/free-schools>, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10345302> and GP commissioning: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2010/nov/18/mutual-decision-healthcare-end-nhs>, <http://www.pulsetoday.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=4127854>

⁵ http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/callforevidence_publicservicereform.pdf

⁶ Research has shown that a state-controlled NHS is the only way of delivering health care that is not based on ability to pay, and is also the most cost-effective way of doing so: Randeep Ramesh, *The Guardian*, Friday 19 November 2010, Seamus Milne, *The Guardian*, Wednesday 17 November 2010

⁷ Letter to *The Times*, January 17 2011, from the health unions the BMA, RCN, Unison, Unite, RCM and CSP, quoted at <http://www.touchstoneblog.org.uk/2011/01/nhs-reforms-%E2%80%99Cextremely-risky-and-potentially-disastrous%E2%80%99D/>

⁸ 'Commissioning: Possible' GMCVO, November 2008

organisation delivering the service doesn't end up out of pocket, it is usually because this has been initiated by and fought for by local community and voluntary sector organisations.

The Local State and Voluntary Action in West Sussex, by Adur Voluntary Action/NCIA, found that unless consideration of other factors is deliberately built in, the market model of selecting a service can be random, ignoring common sense, history and personal relationships which are important to the success of a service: 'tendering specifications and processes have not placed a value on local experience, local focus or degree of 'embeddedness' within local communities.'⁹

Contracts are re-tendered every few years, perhaps even annually, threatening continuity of service: lessons learned over a long period of working in the area or with the relevant user group are lost every time a new (probably cheaper) provider takes over.¹⁰ Groups that work with vulnerable people, or on unpopular issues like immigration, find it difficult to survive in a market place because they cannot charge for their service or get large donations. Smaller organisations cannot compete with large ones in delivering the lowest 'unit cost'.¹¹ The substantial resources required to submit tenders are often unavailable to them.

Commissioning is people getting what the government says they should get, not the service they need

In the commissioning model, a service will be funded if it fits the priorities of the commissioners. Brand new or innovative work is too high risk for a market-based system and too hard to cost and evaluate. While grants supported the principle behind an organisation's existence, sometimes providing core funding for office and staffing without specifying activities, commissioning is project-specific. The loss of support for the broader philosophy of an organisation can mean the loss of its ability to respond flexibly to changing local need.

The rigid monitoring of most commissioned services and the growing practice of 'payment by results' (meaning the organisation will get paid according to successes achieved, such as number of unemployed people put into jobs) discourage holistic or preventative services which have less clear or immediate outcomes. Long term thinking and planning are impossible because contracts are short with no guarantee of renewal and government priorities and funding systems are always changing.

The market damages organisations and the people working in them

Privatisation leads to cutting corners: the quality of services and the conditions for employees suffer as organisations have to be as cheap as possible to win the tender. Charities which have a tradition of valuing their employees and offering them good terms and conditions might find themselves competing with other charities or private sector organisations which have reduced these entitlements to make their service cheaper. The outsourcing of services previously delivered by government agencies with a strong history of unionisation to protect employees is likely to reduce collective bargaining power, as departments are broken up into smaller units with differing terms and conditions and no automatic union recognition. People working for low wages are most commonly found in the

⁹ Available here: <http://www.adurva.org/Downloads/West%20Sussex%20report%20-%20final.pdf>

¹⁰ Adur report, as 9

¹¹ NAVCA response to the green paper 'Modernising Commissioning': 'there is a real risk that the extension of payment by results could exclude smaller voluntary organisations and community groups from entering the market, as they do not have the working capital to continue operating whilst they await payment.'

private sector (followed by the voluntary sector, and most rarely in the state sector).¹² The switching of contracts between providers means that staff can be moved between them, suffering insecurity and a loss of connection to their organisation and their work.

Commissioning threatens the independence of charities and community groups

A defining feature of voluntary sector organisations is their ability to act as an external point of pressure to hold the state and the market to account. The more they get drawn into delivering public services, the less they will be able to question and comment on government policy and to act independently from it. The Baring Foundation's submission to the previous government's *Inquiry on Commissioning Public Services from the Third Sector* said that commissioning forms 'a significant threat to the sector's independence.'¹³

The market cannot replace the voluntary sector

The coalition government wants to institutionalise the idea that the preferred way to fund traditionally charitable activity is through 'social enterprise' methods¹⁴: loans and income generation through contracts, charging or trading, rather than grants or other public subsidies.¹⁵ These are the first steps towards ending government support for voluntary action completely.

People who work for charities usually do so because they are interested in the issues, not because they want to run a business to make profits for shareholders, or do slick marketing to persuade people to want something or prefer them over another provider. Their ethos is based on working together with similar organisations, cross-referring and sharing ideas, not competing. This model provides the best service to their users.¹⁶ The Carnegie Commission of Inquiry into the Future of Civil Society reported that 'voluntary and community organisations are in danger of losing their distinctiveness by mimicking business practices and values.'¹⁷

Many users of services will not trust an organisation they see either as aligned with government or profit-making: the independent charitable identity is a strong draw for them as well as for staff.¹⁸ In a report about housing associations for the Baring Foundation, Andrew Purkis found that, by delivering contracts for government, housing associations had sacrificed their independence. They had also compromised their ability to provide user satisfaction and choice, to empower users, to be respected by and work flexibly with other

¹² 'Low Pay in the UK' Almond and Kendall, LSE, 2000, pg.45, quoted by Daniel Dorling (*Injustice*, Policy Press 2010, pg. 98)

¹³ <http://www.baringfoundation.org.uk/PASCsubmission.pdf>

¹⁴ The term 'social enterprise' is what you make it: there is no legal entity called social enterprise. This allows a wide range of agencies to describe themselves in this way: co-operative shops in rural villages, consultancy firms 'making a difference,' residential care homes, and the multi-million pound Welsh Water which pays its Chair £150,000 a year

¹⁵ The recent NHS White Paper 'Equity and Excellence: Liberating the NHS' (July 2010), states that the Government aims to create 'the largest social enterprise sector in the world'

¹⁶ NAVCA response to 'Modernising Commissioning': 'charities are required to be independent of government and are accountable primarily to their stakeholders, who are often disadvantaged communities. The funding and grant making economy within which they grow and develop operates differently from other economies and commissioners need to take into account the impact of market approaches'

¹⁷ 'Making Good Society, Final Report to the Commission of Inquiry into the Future of Civil Society in the UK and Ireland' Carnegie UK Trust, 2010, pg. 28

¹⁸ Manchester report, as 8

organisations, and to campaign.¹⁹ He argues that there are lessons to be learned from this example for the rest of the voluntary sector: 'By positioning the sector as an implement of government policy...government risks destroying the very attributes it values in the sector.'²⁰

4. Localism and 'big society'

Big what?

The 'big society' fits with other government policies in that its major concern is increasing the power of businesses and already powerful individuals. In the gap between what the state won't provide, determined by the cuts, and what the private or voluntary sector can't make money from, people will be left to make their own arrangements.

The main elements of the 'big society' are: a small grants fund on about the same scale as the previous government's Grassroots Grants programme; a training programme for local community organisers; a National Citizen's Service to put 16 year olds on volunteering programmes; a 'big society' day to celebrate volunteering; private sector mentors for groups of people wanting to set up co-operatives and mutuals to take over local services and the 'big society' bank – money from dormant bank accounts which will be used to provide loans to social enterprises (the involvement of the banks in this scheme has been in return for promises by the government that it will not increase their regulation²¹).

The proposals are dismissed by nearly everyone in the voluntary and community sector when they are talking off the record. In public, some organisations engage with the 'big society' as if they think it is a workable concept, lining up to help 'deliver' it, in the hope that they can grab a piece of the ever-diminishing funding pie.²² By declining to highlight the ideologically noxious thinking behind the 'big society', voluntary organisations are colluding in their own demise, allowing the government to turn all activity that used to be called 'charity', 'voluntary' or 'civil society' into business. The 'big society' is certainly lazy and cynical policy-making (if good things happen the government will claim credit for having 'enabled' people to do things for themselves, if they don't it will be the fault of people for not being enterprising enough and expecting the state to fix their problems), but it is also much worse than that. Matt Scott, Director of the Community Sector Coalition, says: 'If someone wanted to set the sector back not just decades but into the Victorian era they could not do better.'²³

Localism: a big market of fragmented and unaccountable services

The 'big society' plans are linked to the government's Localism Bill. Voters will be able to challenge how council services are run, force them to be tendered out and overrule planning decisions. As Matt Scott puts it, 'local people are to be given the power to instigate local

¹⁹ 'Housing Associations in England and the Future of Voluntary Organisations' Baring Foundation, June 2010

²⁰ 'Allies not Servants' Matthew Smerdon, Baring Foundation, November 2006, quoted by Andrew Purkis, as 52

²¹ Sky news blog, 25 November 2010: <http://blogs.news.sky.com/kleinman/Post:c63232fc-e28f-4e11-a04f-943ab67c641b>

²² An example from Voluntary Action Stoke on Trent: 'Our key aim is to advance and promote the professional development of the Voluntary and Community Sectors (VCS) now known as **Big Society**. From our dedicated Board of Trustees to our front line team, we have the skills and experience to help VCO's compete and prosper in the 21st Century marketplace.' (<http://www.vast.org.uk/>)

²³ Matt Scott, Community Sector Coalition: http://cscdirector.blogspot.com/2011_01_01_archive.html

referendums in the hope that they might be persuaded to save local facilities threatened with closure and run them themselves – a poisoned chalice if ever there was one.’²⁴

Much has been made of the possibility of services coming under community control. However the ‘right to challenge’ included in the bill is specifically intended to open up the ‘public service market’. In the absence of any genuine ‘enabling and encouraging’²⁵ of communities to take on services (in fact the reverse is happening as local charities and community provision are being decimated by cuts), it is the large corporate charities and the private sector which are taking on this role. *The Independent* reports that ‘LSSI, an American firm which manages 13 public libraries across the US, has set itself a target to manage libraries in eight British local authorities by the end of the year and to capture 15 per cent of the market within five years.’²⁶

Decentralised provision of social services means fragmented provision. Private companies are accountable to their shareholders, not to communities. Charities are independent in structure and nature: they are designed to be responsive to their members, who may represent a small interest group. Their trustees have a high level of autonomy and government regulation of them is light. This is an appropriate model for the services charities have traditionally provided outside the realm of statutory provision. It is not appropriate for delivering essential services that need to be consistent nationally and answer to the whole population.

NAVCA has called for ‘safeguards to ensure that the new mutuals have inclusive governance arrangements, are accountable to local communities and service users and that asset locks are in place.’²⁷ It is unlikely that the government will enforce this when it is making no such demands on corporations like LSSI. The head of the civil service has ordered an inquiry into the democratic impact of the localism bill and the ‘big society’ because of concerns over accountability.²⁸ The information commissioner has warned that the accountability of the state will be eroded as more and more services are outsourced, ‘because everything from children’s services to doctors’ practices could end up outside the scope of the Freedom of Information Act.’²⁹

Big government

The reforms in the Localism Bill do not fundamentally change the relationship between central and local state. Britain remains unlike most European countries in that local government is legally and financially dependent on central government. London School of Economics professor George Jones said in his evidence to the House of Commons Select Committee on Communities and Local Government: ‘Ministers are essentially promoting sub-localism, taking powers from councils allegedly to give to ‘Big Society’ actors below the

²⁴ Matt Scott, Community Sector Coalition, as 23

²⁵ David Cameron said, in his speech launching the ‘big society’, that it would be about government ‘enabling and encouraging people to come together to solve their problems and make life better’
http://www.conservatives.com/News/News_stories/2010/03/Plans_announced_to_help_build_a_Big_Society.aspx

²⁶ ‘Cameron’s Big Society relaunch runs into big trouble’ *The Independent*, 15 February 2011
<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/camerons-big-society-relaunch-runs-into-big-trouble-2215053.html>

²⁷ NAVCA evidence to the ‘Public Administration Select Committee Inquiry into the Big Society’ pg 7-8.

²⁸ ‘Big society plans raise concerns for parliamentary democracy’ *The Guardian*, 21 January 2011
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2011/jan/21/big-society-parliamentary-democracy>

²⁹ *The Guardian*, as 28

local authority level, but ineluctably sucking up key control functions to Whitehall at the same time.³⁰

Big cuts

The slashing of spending on public services and the voluntary sector attacks everything that would be necessary to create the society David Cameron says he wants, in which 'the innovation, the can-do spirit and the imagination'³¹ of people drives things. New initiatives and ideas need funding, and running a community centre or a library needs experienced people and resources. Geoff Mulgan, chief executive of the Young Foundation, said: 'many in the sector fear that the Big Society Bank's funds will be directed only to low-risk established ventures, and steer clear of genuine innovation.'³²

Dame Elisabeth Hoodless, former Chief Executive of CSV, Britain's largest volunteering charity, said on Radio 4's *Today* programme, 'there are a lot of very worthwhile programmes, for example volunteers working in child protection as promoted by the minister for children, which are now under threat of closure...It's about one hand not appreciating what the other hand's doing.'³³

Is this apparent contradiction because the government is not actually interested in the level of innovation, empowerment or effectiveness of what happens in any of our local areas, but is rather seeking a justification for not paying for it? Cabinet Office Minister Francis Maude said in response to Hoodless' comments: 'Building the big society is not about pouring taxpayers' money into the voluntary sector. What we are doing is supporting a new culture where everyone gets involved and society stops relying on the state to provide all the answers. I believe too much time is spent asking the taxpayer to prop up traditional organisations.'³⁴

Big bigotry

The 'big society' project has heralded the return of a no-nonsense language of judgement, prejudice, patronising philanthropy and compulsion, in which individuals, groups of people and whole geographical areas are branded problematic by the government and required to change. The government has spoken of 'the crime, the abuse, the incivility on our streets...the broken society.'³⁵

There is an emphasis in policy papers on the importance of 'Britishness',³⁶ a concept which is never defined, but seems to be something to do with rediscovering this civility, responsibility and positive attitude which is said to have been lost, particularly in 'deprived' areas.

One of the elements of the 'big society', the idea for a National Citizen Service for young people, was initially presented as a form of national service to 'help prepare young people

³⁰ Quoted on LSE blog: <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/tag/localism-and-the-big-society/>

³¹ David Cameron, as 25

³² *The Independent*, as 26

³³ *Today programme*, Radio 4, 17 February 2011 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-12378974>

³⁴ 'Francis Maude denies spending cuts undermining big society' *Third Sector*, 8 February 2011 <http://www.thirdsector.co.uk/news/Article/1053626/Francis-Maude-denies-spending-cuts-undermining-big-society/>

³⁵ David Cameron, as 25

³⁶ E.g. 'National Citizen Service' Conservative Party, 2010, pg. 10

for adult life, as well as bringing Britain together in one shared, classless, patriotic mission.³⁷ The actual requirement for a week of military training didn't survive into the 2010 version of the policy, but the programme was described as having 'the same spirit as national service'.³⁸ Young people who have been designated 'the hardest to reach', which to this government is synonymous with having 'anti social' tendencies, 'will not be given any dispensation for unacceptable behaviour...hard to reach young people should be encouraged to take part in this programme...on a level playing field with everyone else.'³⁹ The government knows before it begins which people fit its image of acceptable, civically responsible Britishness and which don't.

Big inequalities

One of the aims of the 'big society' is to build 'a fairer, richer, safer Britain, where opportunity is more equal and poverty is abolished.'⁴⁰ However, the proposals ignore the effects of existing, and ever-growing, economic inequality in society.⁴¹ A BBC report quotes Matthew Taylor, Chief Executive of the Royal Society of Arts: "If the big society is going to be powerful, its power must be felt in deprived communities"...Mr Cameron and the other architects of the concept represent relatively affluent constituencies, in rural areas, where there is a settled population and plenty of fit and active retired people with time on their hands for volunteering. It is a very different story, argues Mr Taylor, in the inner cities, where the coalition's cuts are likely to hit the hardest, and where people often lack the confidence, or the spare time, to take over services such as libraries and community centres that might be facing closure.'⁴²

The proposals pay no attention to equality of representation or long-term co-operation between communities. There are no safeguards to prevent less confident voices being drowned out by the more vocal. The Office for Public Management says that some communities might become engaged in the way the government imagines, but that 'it is harder to see how such a movement will evolve in communities with low levels of civic participation [and] deep levels of social exclusion.'⁴³

The New Economics Foundation says: 'If change is created at the local level only, it will not survive in a system where inequality is endemic. There need to be structural changes to the economy, to prevent the concentration of wealth and power in a few hands, leaving others with little or none...Communities will not be 'mended' unless we build a broader economy.'⁴⁴

³⁷ 'It's Time to Inspire Britain's Teenagers' Conservative Party, 2007. Quoted by Tania de St Croix in 'Struggles and Silences: Policy, Youth Work and the National Citizen Service' Youth and Policy, 2011

³⁸ 'National Citizen Service' Conservative Party, 2010. Quoted by Tania de St Croix, as 37

³⁹ 'National Citizen Service' Conservative Party, 2010, pg. 11

⁴⁰ David Cameron, as 25

⁴¹ Andrew Climo, Chief Executive of Community Leaders, says: 'At present the Government has not designed or implemented any policy that can be seen to address poverty in any profound way: higher taxes, significantly reduced public services and joblessness are having a major impact in raising the incidence of poverty.' NWCAN e bulletin, March 2011

⁴² 'Big Society: more than a soundbite?' BBC online, 14 February 2011: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-12163624>

⁴³ 'The New Neighbourhood Army' Office for Public Management, December 2010, pg 1

⁴⁴ 'Ten Big Questions about the Big Society' New Economics Foundation, June 2010 <http://www.neweconomics.org/publications/ten-big-questions-about-the-big-society>

Big demands on ordinary people

Smaller, wholly or mainly volunteer-run voluntary sector organisations and community groups are being told the 'big society' is for them: they can expand, entrepreneurially, into delivering public services.

Quite apart from the fact that these groups are unlikely to be able to compete with multi million pound corporations in the public service market (no special treatment for the voluntary sector either, just as there is to be none for immigrants or the 'hard to reach,' as that would spoil the 'level playing field' that allows the already privileged to dominate), most of these groups have no interest in delivering public services. They have arisen out of their communities for their own reasons, and their vision about what is needed may not fit the government's. A Third Sector Research Centre working paper found that most grass-roots community groups saw themselves as an 'important response to needs that were currently unmet either due to lack of resources, or the failure of the state and other agencies to identify or address need.'⁴⁵ Getting involved in a local group to improve your community is different from taking responsibility for a social enterprise and bidding for contracts. People's time and energy for civic involvement is finite: if it is diverted into delivering essential services which the government should be providing, less of it will be available for them to express their ideas about what they want to see instead.

Matt Scott says: 'Real devolution of power by communities would go beyond the opportunity to call for a referendum...or take over the running of a building...if localism were to happen from the grassroots upwards we would see a rich diversity of informal community action, which inevitably takes years and costs money. The more likely scenario is that local community action will continue to decline, as always happens at times of economic hardship because the rational choice is to use one's time to seek paid work, not to volunteer.'⁴⁶ Historically, vibrant community activity (as well as lower levels of inequality and a healthier population) have been seen most in times of high government investment in local public services.⁴⁷ Public provision creates spin-off voluntary sector provision and informal community activity: libraries, educational institutions and community centres funded by the state provide focus for people to gather and work together.

Big control

The 2008 Conservative Party green paper *A Stronger Society* quoted the architect of the welfare state, William Beveridge: 'People and organisations are...more 'vigorous and abundant' when given the freedom to act on their own initiative rather than when ordered from above.'⁴⁸ It is difficult to see how cuts to their independent sources of funding and the exhortation to deliver services determined by the government will help community groups and organisations to do this. The Carnegie Commission said: 'Civil society associations can never be just providers of services...civil society thrives best when it has an independent and confident spirit, when it is not beholden to the state or funders, and when it is not afraid to make trouble.'⁴⁹

⁴⁵ 'Understanding the distinctiveness of small scale, third sector activity' Third Sector Research Centre, May 2010.

⁴⁶ Matt Scott, Community Sector Coalition, as 23

⁴⁷ See 'A central role for local government? The example of late Victorian Britain' by Simon Szreter, History and Policy <http://www.historyandpolicy.org/papers/policy-paper-01.html>

⁴⁸ Quoted in 'A Stronger Society: Voluntary Action in the 21st Century' Conservative Party, 2008.

⁴⁹ 'Making Good Society, Final Report to the Commission of Inquiry into the Future of Civil Society in the UK and Ireland' Carnegie UK Trust 2010, pg. 28

Why then are pressure groups, trade unions, the networks that are engaging people and supporting them to take action together not discussed as part of the government's vision of vibrant community activity? They are not just absent from the 'big society' picture, they are being attacked.⁵⁰ The government seems intimidated by the plurality of community activity, some of which is unpalatable to it. This plurality is part of what makes a free society. Real debate by ordinary people is what distinguishes a strong democracy from a weak one.⁵¹

Community groups which emerge for other reasons than to deliver services are a way for people with less power in society (most of us) to look out for each other and represent ourselves. If we feel we have no voice, the result is increasing social strife in communities. This is why, historically, more enlightened governments and charitable trusts have given informal, needs-led local groups money and support which did not compromise their independence.

It is not just individual groups and services which are in danger of disappearing as part of the 'big society,' privatisation and cuts. It is the recognition of and support for a whole sphere of human activity: the space in which people are free to do things, large or small, not because the government promotes them or because they will generate profit, but to change the world.

This is a summary version of the full paper, which is available at www.independentaction.net

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⁵⁰ 'The Trade Union Co-ordinating Group today denounced the CBI's recommendations for 'modernising' the laws relating to industrial action as an attack on trade unionism which if enacted would undermine the fundamental human rights of workers' (Trade Union Co-ordinating Group, 6th October 2010) http://www.fburegion6.co.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=625:unions-vows-to-fight-fundamental-attack-on-trade-unionism&catid=1:latest-news&Itemid=50

⁵¹ See *The Politics of Civil Society*, Frederick Powell, Policy Press 2007, pg. 4