



October 2010

## **Rural Economies intelligence report: economic conditions for organisations contributing to the Big Society in rural England**

### **Introduction**

The Big Society is an important feature of this government's agenda. It seeks to decentralise power and give individuals, communities and local government a greater say and responsibility in decision making and addressing the challenges they face. It is still an evolving programme. Although 'Building the Big Society'<sup>1</sup>, the document which was published when the government announced the Big Society on 18 May 2010 outlines the main themes and tools<sup>2</sup> to make Big Society possible. Forthcoming legislation and policy announcements will clarify more what it involves.

Since its announcement, the Big Society has received a mixed reaction from civil society<sup>3</sup> organisations across the UK. While it has broadly been welcomed in principle, doubts and concerns have been raised about how it will be implemented in practice. Particularly, the current and impending public spending cuts and their impact cause widespread anxiety with many worrying that the civil society sector might be an easy target for cuts at a time when it is already seeing its resources reduced and it is expected to do more; some others say that the Big Society will be a smokescreen for cuts, an attempt by the government to make it acceptable to stop providing public services.

This report looks at how the Big Society is perceived by civil society organisations in rural England and their economic conditions in the current financial climate. It draws in great part on the experiences of over 70 organisations and local authorities that responded to our call for evidence as well as some national data sets and surveys. This report should be read with, and as a companion report to the report we submitted in September to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, which also gives a profile of the organisations that contributed to this report and summarises their experiences in the current financial and economic climate.

For further information; please contact Elif Skinner, Research Assistant in the Commission for Rural Communities' Rural Economies team [elif.skinner@ruralcommunities.gov.uk](mailto:elif.skinner@ruralcommunities.gov.uk) or Roger Turner, Head of Rural Economies [roger.turner@ruralcommunities.gov.uk](mailto:roger.turner@ruralcommunities.gov.uk)

### **The structure of this report**

This report initially provides a picture of the tradition of 'Big Society' and civil society in rural

---

<sup>1</sup> Building the Big Society, <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/407789/building-big-society.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> These include among others devolving power to communities and local government; supporting the creation and expansion of mutuals, co-operatives, charities and social enterprises and encouraging them to have a greater involvement in the delivery of public services; creating a "Big Society Bank" which will provide finance for neighbourhood groups, charities, social enterprises and other nongovernmental bodies; introducing a National Citizenship Service etc.

<sup>3</sup> In this report, National Council for Voluntary Organisations' (NCVO) definition of the civil society is used. In "The State and the Voluntary Sector-Recent trends in government funding and public service delivery", NCVO states that "*Civil society entities cover a wide range of groups, societies and organisations which share common values (such as belief in voluntary association) and practices (the retention and application of surpluses for purposes). These organisations include housing associations, universities, independent schools, trade unions, political parties and co-operatives. At the core of civil society, is the voluntary sector.*"

England. Then we report how civil society in rural England views the Big Society agenda and offers insight into how such organisations are funded. The experience of those organisations who submitted evidence to secure and maintain funding, and the demands for the services are then described, before we report how these organisations are responding to these challenges. We have used case studies to bring life to this profile throughout the report. Towards the end of the report, we set out some of the responses that these organisations would like to see from the government to enable them to fully contribute and benefit from the Big Society. Two annexes to the report contain further cases studies to showcase the breadth of civil society in rural England, and list the organisations that responded to the call for evidence.

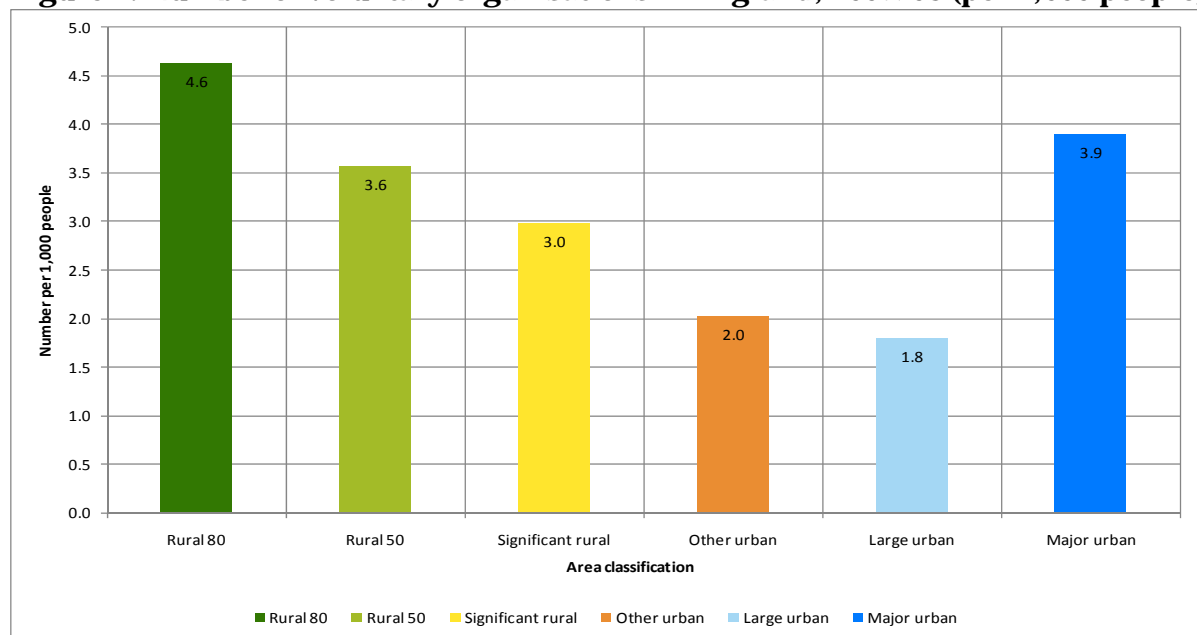
### The Big Society in rural England

The principles behind the government’s Big Society are already well embedded and practiced in many rural communities. The rural communities in England have a strong culture of self-reliance. When the public or the private sector can no longer provide the much needed services such as post offices, village shops, transport, care for the elderly and children, rural communities often come together to find a way to deliver those services themselves.

Rural communities’ tradition of self-reliance has encouraged a higher rate of participation in civic engagement activities in rural areas when compared to urban areas. According to the CLG Citizenship Survey 2007-2008, in the 12 months before the interview 54 per cent of people living in rural areas engaged in civic engagement activities (civic activism, civic consultation or civic participation). This contrasts with less than half (45 per cent) of urban residents.<sup>4</sup>

This culture of self-reliance is also reflected in the numbers of voluntary organisations in rural areas. As shown in Figure 1, on average, rural districts in England are home to more voluntary organisations<sup>5</sup> per thousand people compared to urban areas.<sup>6</sup>

**Figure 1: Number of voluntary organisations in England, 2007/08 (per 1,000 people)**



<sup>4</sup> CLG Citizenship Survey 2007-2008: Empowered Communities Topic Report, September 2009, <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/statistics/pdf/1345295.pdf> Civic activism, participation and consultation activities are defined in the report as: *Civic activism activities include undertaking specific responsibilities in the community being a councillor, a school governor, a magistrate or a special constable) and involvement in groups which had a decision-making role in local services; Civic participation activities include contacting a local councillor, council official, MP or government official, as well as attending a public meeting or rally, taking part in a public demonstration and signing a petition; Civic consultation activities include completing a questionnaire about local services or problems, attending a public meeting about local services or problems and being a part of a group discussing local services or problems.*

<sup>5</sup> NCVO defines voluntary organisations as “organisations which meet the ‘general charities’ definition”. Those that are controlled by government, independent schools, faith groups and some others are excluded from the definition.

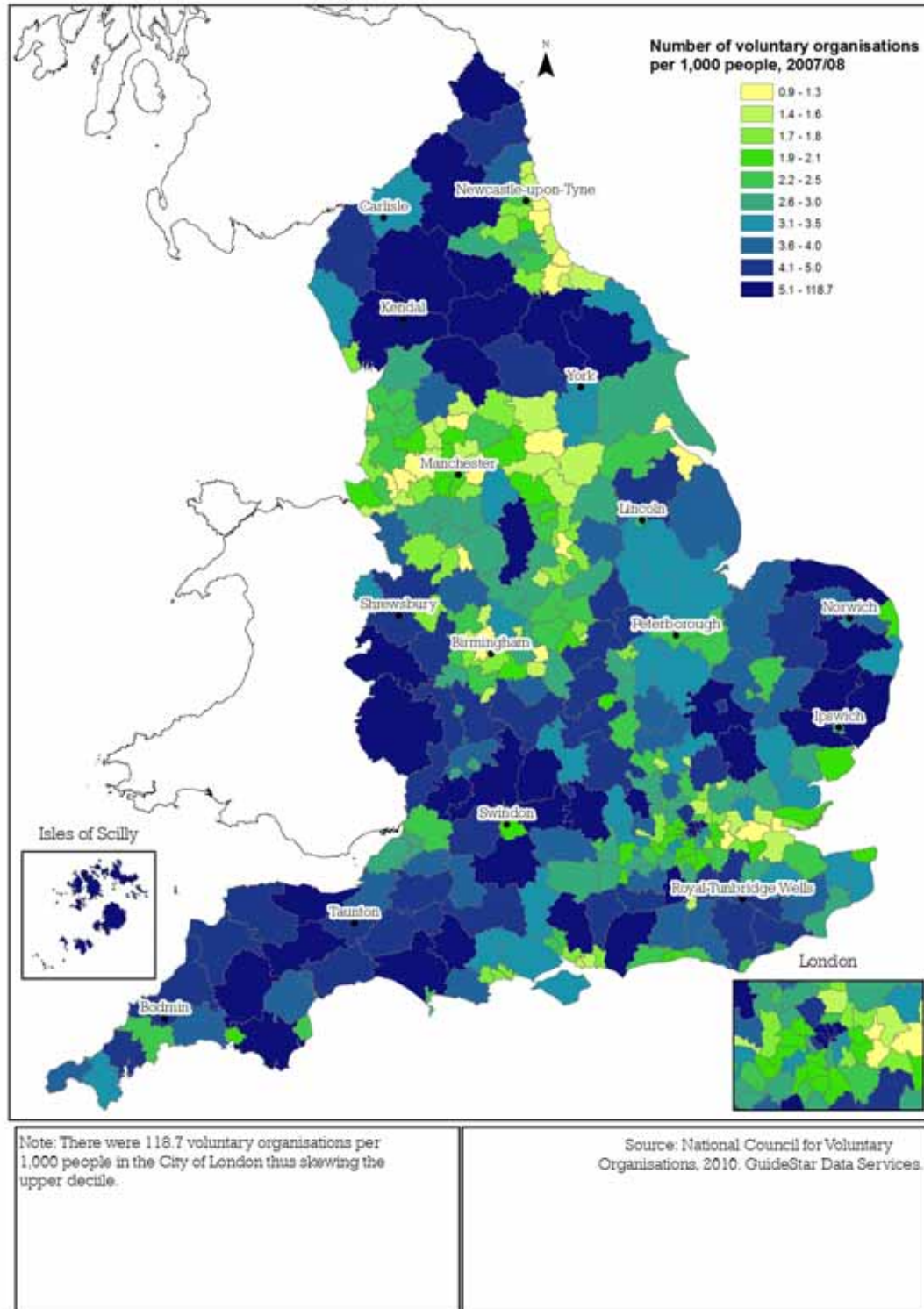
<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that as the analysis is based on organisations’ registered address with the Charity Commission, the activities of national and international organisations are mapped in the local authority which hosts their headquarters.

Source: NCVO and Guidestar Data Services

Notes: (i) Data on English and Welsh charities supplied by Guide Star Services CIC (GDS) has been used by NCVO for analysis of UK general charities The GDS database cover all registered third sector organisations. More information can be found at [www.gs-ds.co.uk](http://www.gs-ds.co.uk)

(ii) For the purposes of this analysis only local authorities in England have been included.

**Figure 2: Number of voluntary organisations in England, 2007/08  
(per 1,000 people)**



Source: NCVO and Guidestar Data Services

Notes: (i) Data on English and Welsh charities supplied by Guide Star Services CIC (GDS) has been used by NCVO for analysis of UK general charities The GDS database cover all registered third sector organisations. More information can be found at [www.gs-ds.co.uk](http://www.gs-ds.co.uk)

(ii) For the purposes of this analysis only local authorities in England have been included.

A closer look (Table 1) at this geography shows that the City of London has by far the greatest concentration of voluntary organisations in England with 118.7 voluntary organisations per 1,000 population. However, in general, rural local authorities have more voluntary organisations per 1,000 population than urban local authorities.

**Table 1: Number of voluntary organisations in England by local authority, 2007/08 Top/Bottom 10, (per 1,000 people)**

Name	Region	Area classification	Per 1,000 population
<b>Top 10</b>			
City of London	London	MU	118.7
Westminster	London	MU	11.3
Eden	North West	R80	7.7
Cotswold	South West	R80	7.3
Camden	London	MU	7.2
Isles of Scilly	South West	R80	7.1
South Lakeland	North West	R80	6.8
South Shropshire	West Midlands	R50	6.8
West Somerset	South West	R80	6.3
Derbyshire Dales	East Midlands	R80	6.3
Nuneaton and Bedworth	West Midlands	OU	1.2
<b>Bottom 10</b>			
St. Helens	North West	MU	1.2
Wakefield	Yorkshire and the Humber	SR	1.2
Barking and Dagenham	London	MU	1.2
Stoke-on-Trent	West Midlands	LU	1.1
Knowsley	North West	MU	1.1
Sandwell	West Midlands	MU	1.1
Wigan	North West	MU	1.0
South Tyneside	North East	MU	1.0
Blackpool	North West	LU	0.9

Source: NCVO and Guidestar Data Services

Notes: (i) Data on English and Welsh charities supplied by Guide Star Services CIC (GDS) has been used by NCVO for analysis of UK general charities. The GDS database covers all registered third sector organisations. More information can be found at [www.gs-ds.co.uk](http://www.gs-ds.co.uk)

(ii) For the purposes of this analysis only local authorities in England have been included.

Of course voluntary organisations constitute only one part of the civil society in rural England. Responses to our call for evidence provide a good representation of the diverse range of organisations who will contribute to the Big Society in rural areas, through organisations of all shapes and sizes, working on a national, regional or local scale, addressing different needs, and targeting distinct audiences. They range from the nationwide network of 38 Rural Community Councils, empowering and enabling rural communities to have their own voice and undertake activities themselves by supporting them in areas such as community led planning, rural community buildings, affordable rural housing, transport and access to services; and Citizens Advice Bureaux offering help and advice for residents and employees on issues such as debt management, employment affairs, benefit and housing needs. Voluntary and community sector (VCS) infrastructure organisations provide advice and support to the local community action organisations to help them to run their organisations successfully and spread good practice and encourage joint working; village halls and church buildings which often provide a venue for democratic participation as well as for various activities which bring the communities together to address local issues and sometimes serve as a shop, post office, IT training facility, children or older person's facilities; local councils, social enterprises; housing trusts; co-operatives and many more. Case studies in Annex 1 give a flavour of the breadth of civil society activity in rural England.

Rural England supports a plethora of organisations and activities that demonstrate that the Big Society is already embedded in many rural communities.

### **How the Big Society is perceived in rural England**

The submissions to our call for evidence show that the Big Society is generally welcomed by civil society in rural England. Many civil society organisations hope that it will be a valuable policy tool and provide opportunities to improve or even expand their services.

*“I believe the current situation is an opportunity for the bureau and the local authority. The bureau could well take over some of the services currently carried out by the local authority at a reduced cost. An example would be benefit checking where the local authority has its own staff doing this task.”* (West Berkshire Citizens Advice Bureau)

*“As rural practitioners, we are thrilled by the “Big Society” agenda. Indeed we have every reason to believe that rural communities already demonstrate many of the attitudes and ways of working which lie at the heart of the “Big Society” approach.”* (Yorkshire and the Humber Regional Forum)

Many responses confirm that the Big Society has been a part of rural England for a long time, and that existing organisations and structures are well placed to deliver the Big Society ambitions.

*“... place of churches, their resources, volunteers, and presence in local communities will be totally in tune with the kind of voluntary activity the government wishes to encourage as part of our contribution to the Big Society. This brings opportunities for churches, who remain at the heart of local communities, and who exemplify how volunteers and charitable organisations can contribute to civil society. This is particularly recognised in our rural projects, which are known as having a branch in every village! However, it remains to be seen whether in the current climate there will be any resources to support that work.”* (Churches Regional Commission for Yorkshire and the Humber)

*“The Big Society is already here in rural Kent, and it owns an organisation (Action with Communities in Rural Kent) that has been helping run community and business services for almost nine decades. The Big Society agenda of the coalition government is an opportunity to build upon that proven track-record without creating unnecessary duplicative delivery mechanisms”* (The Action with Rural Communities in Kent)

Some organisations are pleased to report that the Big Society agenda has ensured greater interest and support from public bodies for their activities. Rural Action Yorkshire, for example, reports that demand for its services is growing because public authorities value more than previously the opportunity that Rural Action Yorkshire offers them to work more closely with rural communities. Yorkshire Rural Support Network which has around 100 members encompassing the public, private and voluntary sectors similarly notes that North Yorkshire County Council is very keen to work with the Network to support farming families through the Sure Start Centres throughout North Yorkshire, some of which cover the most isolated communities. They report that such cooperation will enable Network members, currently working in these communities with excellent links to local support and churches, to do more outreach work through the Sure Start Centres. It will also help to alert Sure Start professionals to situations where further help and support may be required.

Some of the local authorities which answered our call for evidence affirm their willingness to work more closely with the civil society. Oxfordshire County Council (OCC), for instance, sees voluntary sector organisations as important partners in maintaining high quality services at a time when the resources are limited. OCC plan to build on what is already there to continue delivering better public services rather than duplicating work. In this context, it plans to look at how infrastructure support for community and voluntary organisations is structured and funded across the local authorities; and ensure that this is robust enough to meet the ambitions of Big Society and to survive the national funding restrictions. The council is also an active partner in the Oxfordshire Stronger Communities Alliance of voluntary and statutory sector partners. It funds and facilitates various projects which support the Alliance’s work programme across urban and rural Oxfordshire.

Such mutually supportive relationships however are not operating everywhere. Several other respondents voice concerns that some public bodies are not supporting volunteer efforts in an effective way or are duplicating efforts by creating new delivery mechanisms rather than supporting existing structures. Volunteer Cornwall is a social enterprise which supports over 1,500 organisations that help communities and individuals in Cornwall. Despite working with public sector partners for the past four years to increase their awareness of how local people can get involved in the creation, development and delivery of services, and to embrace Volunteer Cornwall's work, they report that their public sector partners have only taken an interest in engaging with communities since the launch of the Big Society. Indeed several of these public bodies are now looking into delivering the Big Society themselves, or transferring staff into social enterprises to compete with local groups doing the same type of work. Volunteer Cornwall voices concerns that if the organisations end up competing in order to protect themselves from cuts, rather than cooperating and building on what already exists, rural communities might suffer.

Volunteer Cornwall also describes how bureaucracy hinders further work. For the past three years it has worked with the local authority to gain acceptance for the CRB checks they undertake for volunteers in schools. Acceptance appears to focus only on the inability of Volunteer Cornwall to disclose its findings with the school. Volunteer Cornwall believes that failure to gain acceptance of their approach hinders the involvement of volunteers in public service delivery, by placing extra costs and administrative requirements on schools for example.

Many of those responding to our call for evidence argue that they could do more if given the right support and encouragement. However, there is a real concern that communities that are already struggling for support will be asked to take on additional responsibility without the appropriate infrastructure and resources. They emphasise that it would not be possible for them to increase their role in supporting services without the proper resources.

*“Our Community Land Trust Officer is already working with communities who are in the vanguard area in Eden for the Big Society, but the message we are getting is that the Big Society is a concept, not a funding source. Which is frustrating as some of the progress that the communities have made has meant that they have been chosen as the vanguard, that is because of the support they have had from Cumbria Rural Housing Trust and the CLT project officer, though the majority of the work has been done by the community themselves.”* (Cumbria Rural Housing Trust)

A frequently repeated message from rural civil society organisations was that whilst the Big Society can be cost efficient, it should not be seen as cost free. Organisations need ongoing funds to pay for salaries, supervision, training, administration as well as rent, telephone, stationery, IT, volunteer travel, subscriptions and technical information to survive. Concerns were expressed that the funding for the civil society sector will be an easy target for spending cuts. They are not convinced that the use of money via the Big Society Bank to fund community projects will be sufficient to compensate for the huge cuts the civil society sector is facing.

An additional and overwhelming message received was that self-help should not be seen as a substitute for government support and volunteers should not be regarded as an alternative to paid employment. Moreover, whilst rural communities have the tradition to take action to address needs in their local areas, not all have the time, skills, experience and/or the community leaders/activists to take on volunteering responsibilities. Even the ones that have this capacity still need the support and guidance to be successful. The Mission and Public Affairs Council of the Archbishops' Council of the Church of England reports that as with other rural organisations many of their volunteers are already over-committed and are ageing. Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) offered a reminder that many rural areas do not have an active Parish Council and only meet once a year (as a parish meeting) as a community. It is difficult for such communities to develop the capacity to help themselves without some external intervention. OCC points out that community-led planning and all its resources inevitably focus on those places which are able to do things for themselves; there is need for a greater emphasis on supporting rural communities which are less capable.

Similarly, the Community Land Trust Project Officer based in Cumbria Rural Housing Trust, emphasises that volunteer based service delivery will not work everywhere as some locations have impressive business and project development skills while others do not.

*“We have found that there is a small number of communities which have the resources in volunteer time and skills, and sometimes liquidatable assets, to do remarkable things for themselves, but these are few. On the other hand, we have also found that many communities can achieve a great deal with support from ourselves in assessing need, developing projects and business plans and securing funding. It would be quite wrong if communities which had not attracted retired professional people with the time and skills to respond to the Big Society challenge were left behind for lack of support. The capacity to be self supporting is not present in all communities. Organisations like ours should be regarded as repositories of that capacity which can be passed on to communities as they need it. Unless we are able to sustain our services, disadvantaged communities will be further disadvantaged by the lack of support to their own enterprise.” (Rural Action Yorkshire)*

Furthermore, even if they have the time and the skills, concerns about legal responsibility /liability that might result from volunteering activities discourage individuals from getting involved. Amble Development Trust in Northumberland, restates this message that you cannot simply ask volunteers to get involved in something; even simple activities such as organising an event has to be accompanied with training, public liability insurance, contingency planning, meeting local council policies, meeting local emergence services policies, licences in place e.g. entertainment/PRS/temporary events license, car park/street closures, advertising for the various licenses and stewarding etc.

Rural civil society organisations did not consider that they have sufficient information about what the Big Society actually involves. They are asking what the Big Society means for the delivery of essential services in rural areas, what is the role of local government and of existing voluntary and community sector groups, and they want more information about how the Big Society will be supported. With such uncertainty, many organisations are worried about their future and find it difficult to plan for new challenges or opportunities.

Some respondents expressed concerns that the communities with the ‘loudest voice’ might get the most of the Big Society whereas the most excluded and vulnerable groups might be affected negatively by it. Equality South West, a regional infrastructure body supporting organisations to promote equality and human rights and challenge discrimination, says for example that where local planning decisions are placed into the hands of local communities only, the needs of minority communities, for examples, Gypsies and Travellers and Migrant Workers will not be addressed. Rural Bureaux Network says that vulnerable groups need targeted services, requiring extra funding and sometimes an advocate to help make their case.

Some others express concerns that the Big Society is in fact a smokescreen for cuts or a “Trojan horse for jobs cuts with unpaid volunteers or activists brought in to fill the gaps left behind”. Encouraging local communities to take on responsibility to deliver services without providing them with the sufficient resources to do so will effectively mean these services will no longer exist.

*“ What concerns me about the idea of the Big Society as espoused so far is that it will be a smokescreen for cuts in services but the local community will be blamed if services are withdrawn or costs go up. It is all well and good encouraging local communities to take on responsibility for service delivery, if the payments are adequate. However, the cynic in me worries that as time goes on contract fees will be reduced and withdrawn altogether with the perception being that the parish (or whoever) has made the cuts.” (A self-employed adviser on housing and renewable energy issues in North Northumberland)*

Civil society organisations generally welcome the Big Society and feel that they can contribute even more if they are properly supported. At the same they feel that they do not have much information about how the Big Society agenda will be implemented and they are concerned about the creation of new delivery mechanisms by public bodies without giving much thought to benefiting from existing structures and experience. There are also concerns that the voice of the most vulnerable groups might not be heard and therefore these groups might be affected negatively.

## How civil society organisations in rural England are funded

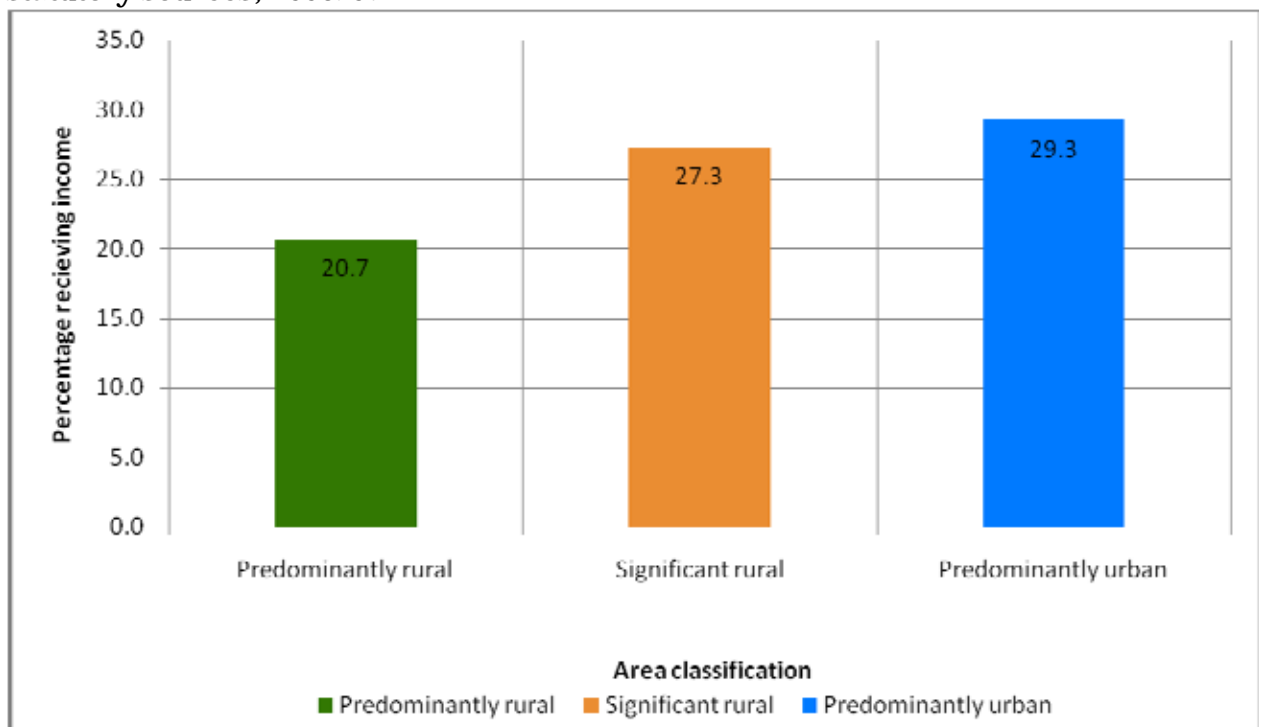
Evidence and comments received show that civil society organisations in rural England draw their main sources of income from a wide variety of sources. These include central government grants and contracts, grants from trusts and foundations, public fundraising, consultancy, rental income, membership and subscription fees, trading and sponsorships.

An important part of their resources come in kind – the best illustration of which are volunteers. Whilst volunteers provide an invaluable resource, an overwhelming message from the respondents is that volunteers are not free and they ask that public sector bodies promoting the Big Society grow to understand this fact. They need training, supervision and travel allowance. The Rural Bureaux Network, which is made up of over 200 Citizens Advice Bureaux operating in rural areas of England and Wales reports that in 2010, the cost of recruiting, training, accommodating and maintaining a volunteer in a bureau is around £2,000 per year per volunteer across the Citizens Advice service as a whole. The Network points out that costs in rural areas tend to be higher due to volunteers having to travel longer distances to take up volunteering and training opportunities. For example, at Purbeck CAB in Dorset, some volunteers have a 40 mile round trip to run an outreach service. The majority of rural bureaux depend on core funding from local authorities to enable them to support their volunteers.

### Reliance on income from statutory sources

On average, a greater proportion of voluntary organisations in predominantly urban areas (29.3%) receive income from statutory sources<sup>7</sup> than voluntary organisations in predominantly rural (20.7%) or significant rural areas (27.3%), as shown in Figure 3.

**Figure 3: Proportion of voluntary sector organisations that receive income from statutory sources, 2006/07**



Source: NCVO and Guidestar Data Services

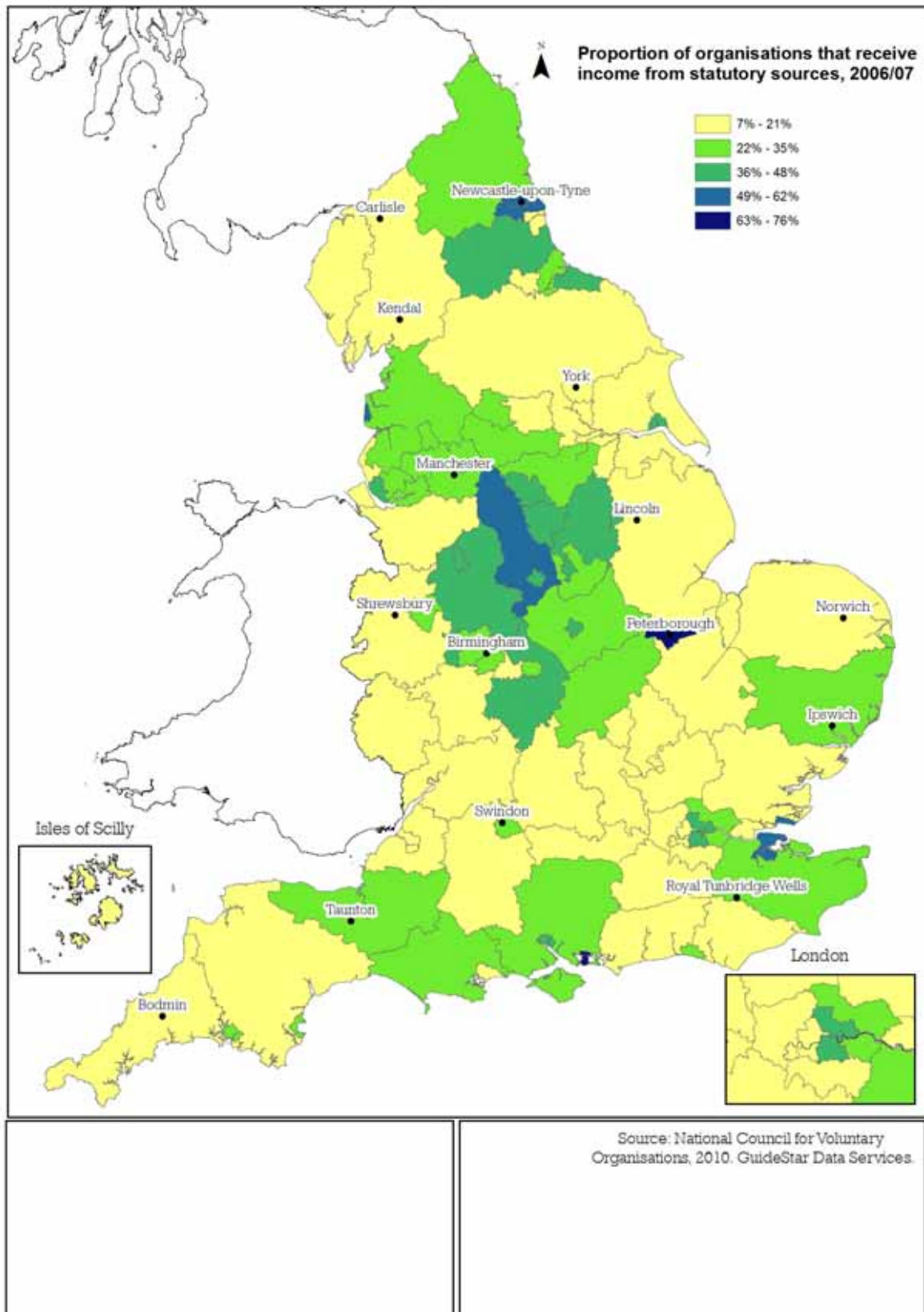
Notes: (i) Data on English and Welsh charities supplied by Guide Star Services CIC (GDS) has been used by NCVO for analysis of UK general charities. The GDS database covers all registered third sector organisations. More information can be found at [www.gs-ds.co.uk](http://www.gs-ds.co.uk)

(ii) For the purposes of this analysis only local authorities in England have been included.

<sup>7</sup> NCVO defines these as including resources (both in form of grants and contracts) from central, local and devolved administrations, international bodies, overseas governments and the National Lottery distributors.



**Figure 4: Proportion of voluntary sector organisations that receive income from statutory sources, 2006/07**



Source: NCVO and Guidestar Data Services

Notes: (i) Data on English and Welsh charities supplied by Guide Star Services CIC (GDS) has been used by NCVO for analysis of UK general charities. The GDS database covers all registered third sector organisations. More information can be found at [www.gs-ds.co.uk](http://www.gs-ds.co.uk)  
(ii) For the purposes of this analysis only local authorities in England have been included.

On the other hand, Table 2 shows that in some rural areas such as South and West Derbyshire (50%), Warwickshire (47%) and North Nottinghamshire (46%), the proportion of voluntary organisations receiving income from statutory sources is quite significant. Nevertheless, Table 2 also demonstrates that out of the ten areas which have the smallest proportion of voluntary sector organisations receiving income from statutory sources, eight are rural. This might be an indication of reduced dependence on government income, thus reduced vulnerability with regard to government spending cuts i.e. the organisations in rural areas have alternative resources that they can tap into and they do not depend so heavily on government grants or contracts to carry out their activities. At the same time, it might be a sign of undeveloped potential i.e. the organisations in rural areas cannot access government funds as much as their urban counterparts.

However, as much as the degree of reliance on government funding, vulnerability will be determined by the shape of cuts. For instance, if the central government reduces funding to local authorities and leaves it to the discretion of local authorities how the reduced funds will be utilised, local authorities might decide to use the money to maintain their core infrastructure and cut completely or reduce funding to civil society organisations. Alternatively, if the central government ring fences funds for civil society organisations, these organisations will be less affected by cuts.

**Table 2: Proportion of voluntary sector organisations that receive income from statutory sources, 2006/07, Top/Bottom 10**

<b>NUTS3 name</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>Three Class</b>	<b>Statutory Income %</b>
<b>Top 10</b>			
Peterborough	East of England	Predominantly urban	76
Portsmouth	South East	Predominantly urban	62
Medway	South East	Predominantly urban	55
Blackpool	North West	Predominantly urban	52
Tyneside	North East	Predominantly urban	51
South and West Derbyshire	East Midlands	Significant rural	50
Southend-on-Sea	East of England	Predominantly urban	48
Warwickshire	West Midlands	Significant rural	47
North Nottinghamshire	East Midlands	Significant rural	46
Derby	East Midlands	Predominantly urban	44
<b>Bottom 10</b>			
Cheshire CC	North West	Significant rural	15
Shropshire CC	West Midlands	Predominantly rural	15
East Cumbria	North West	Predominantly rural	15
Essex CC	East of England	Significant rural	15
North Yorkshire CC	Yorkshire and the Humber	Predominantly rural	15
Thurrock	East of England	Predominantly urban	14
Lincolnshire	East Midlands	Predominantly rural	14
West Cumbria	North West	Predominantly rural	13
Surrey	South East	Predominantly urban	13
East Riding of Yorkshire	Yorkshire and the Humber	Predominantly rural	7

Source: NCVO and Guidestar Data Services

Notes: (i) Data on English and Welsh charities supplied by Guide Star Services CIC (GDS) has been used by NCVO for analysis of UK general charities. The GDS database covers all registered third sector organisations. More information can be found at [www.gs-ds.co.uk](http://www.gs-ds.co.uk)

(ii) For the purposes of this analysis only local authorities in England have been included.

### **Current experiences of financial and economic conditions**

Evidence sent in response to our call for evidence shows that many civil society organisations in rural areas are experiencing reduced resources, at the same time as demand for their services is increasing. Real cuts, as well as anticipated cuts, are causing much anxiety about the future of their projects, and sometimes even threatening survival of their organisations.

## Cuts in income

Many respondents are experiencing funding cuts from central government departments, government agencies, local authorities and/or other civil society organisations. It is clear from responses that as cuts are announced, or in-year budgets are cut by central departments some of these are being passed directly to civil society organisations by withholding grants that are already promised, curtailing service level agreements, stopping referring clients etc.

*“There is currently a great deal of uncertainty for many members who are seeing services and departments reduced. The full extent of reductions will be known when the October Spending Review is presented, but in the meantime, this is a very anxious time.”* (Yorkshire Rural Support Network)

Examples of organisations experiencing funding cuts:

- The National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs (NFYFC), a nationwide body of nearly 700 Young Farmers' Clubs throughout England dedicated to supporting young people in agriculture and the countryside, reports that it lost a significant grant of £396,000 from the then Department for Children, Schools and Families and a £20,000 cut from its grant from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; it says that county federations have incurred cuts in county council funding for staff and continue to do so.
- South East Rural Towns Partnership (SERTP) reports that the south East England Development Agency is clawing back funds from small rural towns in the South East; Business Link is pulling back from participation in some training and other activities to help start up and extension business activities and voluntary sector is seeing some grant bodies pull back funds. SERTP warns that pulling back of funds from existing respected groups so soon after announcing the Big Society will create deep suspicion and kill motivation. It notes that *“It (clawing back funds) has effectively stalled new initiatives in many “Big Society” projects in the South East we are engaged in, by withdrawing some 25% of the “In year” funding, with no notice. These are not projects you can turn on and off at will, they take time to build the case, involve many volunteers and will be a significant negative against “Big Society” ambitions.”*
- Ash-worth Time Bank, which encourages people to share their time and skills with older members of the community in 14 villages in Cheshire, says all public sector grants have been suspended, together with a Service Level Agreement they were promised by Cheshire East. Grants from other sources are no longer available, making grant fundraising extremely difficult.
- The Archway Foundation, a small faith based charity providing a befriending service in Oxfordshire, for those unable or unwilling to access social activities report 50% of income as a result of cuts by the Primary Care Trust.
- Volunteer Cornwall, which undertakes over 5,000 journeys per month through their volunteer driving scheme reports a marked reduction in their funds, due to cuts, especially for funding transport of vulnerable people in Cornwall at a time when the demand is increasing. They experienced a reduction of 16.5% in the amount of journeys being booked by the Adult Care and Children's Services as well as other voluntary and community sector projects compared to the same period last year. With reduced funding they are in deficit by approximately £8,000 after four months and expect to have an operational deficit of approximately £24,000 if this continues to the end of the year.
- Rural Bureaux Network reports that funding that several of the member bureaux have been receiving through the Migration Impact Assessment Fund has been withdrawn mid project and all activities will cease on 30 September 2010. Money from this fund had been used in Oxfordshire to increase services to migrant workers including opening up outreach services and raising awareness within rural communities of the work of the CAB and how to access services.
- Voluntary Action North Lincolnshire, a charity providing support to voluntary and community organisations, reports that sources of funding for rural organisations are beginning to dry up. For example, local authority fund which gives small capital grants for leisure facilities and which has been heavily used by village halls and playing fields has been closed.

Other organisations are also seeing a reduction in income from other sources due to the fragile economic climate. Action with Communities in Rural Kent, the Rural Community Council for Kent and Medway, for example reports that income from investments and banking interest has fallen dramatically in recent years although there was a slight recovery in 2009/10. Enterprise Southwest Shropshire, a social enterprise, says that its income has reduced recently as one of its offices has become vacant and it is finding it difficult to let.

Cuts in income are not only current and real, but also anticipated by many organisations from principal authorities to voluntary and community sector infrastructure organisations, community councils and Citizens Advice Bureaux. Although many are awaiting the Comprehensive Spending Review in October to have more clarity on the future of their funding, some predict what the cuts will be.

- West Lindsey CAB says that its district council has warned them that they are expecting 40% cuts over the next three years and other funders are not sure of future funding. Similarly Forest of Dean CAB reports that it was informed by its local authority –its core funder- to expect cuts of up to 25%.
- Humber and Wolds Rural Community Council (HWRCC) notes that the formal and informal discussions with local authority partners, regarding public sector finances over the next 2-3 years, haven't been encouraging, despite HWRCC being perceived as a strong delivery partner, and despite local authority support for the rural agenda.
- RISE, a social enterprise and a membership organisation, supporting and promoting social enterprise both in the South West and nationally, notes that as a proportion of its funding comes from SWRDA and Business Link, it is expecting funding cuts at the end of the financial year, both are which are facing closure.

The fact that the end of this financial year is coinciding with an end to several funding streams and grant programmes is of particular concern. Ashfield CAB, for example, notes that it only has sufficient funding to last until next March when all its project funding will cease. It says that central government funding for debt will be greatly reduced from the Legal Services Commission and Financial Inclusion Fund from the Department for Business innovation and Skills. County and district councils will also be looking at the funding they grant them as their funding will be cut. Rural Action Yorkshire similarly reports that several of their current grant based projects will come to an end in March 2011 and that they are very concerned about the prospects of accessing new funding streams.

### **Increase in demand**

Many of respondents report that at a time when they are facing cuts, demand for their services is growing due to the economic downturn, public sector bodies working more closely with civil society organisations, and civil society organisations needing more assistance.

- The Rural Bureaux Network reports that over the last 12 months, Citizens Advice Bureaux have experienced a national increase in demand of 18%. In the rural area of West Oxfordshire, the overall increase in demand has risen by 29% and the Bureau in this district has seen a 48% increase in the number of debt enquiries and a 47% increase in the number of housing enquiries. The Rural Bureaux Network notes that although many bureaux received additional funding from the previous government to deal with extra demand following the recession, this funding will cease in November.
- Action with Communities in rural Kent reports that demand for their services have grown by 101% in the last 3 years whereas staffing levels have risen by only 23% in that time.
- Voluntary Action North Lincolnshire reports that demand for their services has tripled in 2 years from 1,105 interventions in 2008-09 to 3,355 interventions in 2009-10. These often relate to funding information and advice but also include assistance with bids, charity law/registration, constitutions, funding information, legal structure, start-ups, organisational capacity building and fund-raising.

### **Greater reliance on parish and town councils**

Submissions show that in the current economic climate, principal authorities are counting more and more on local, parish and town councils to deliver services. Herefordshire Council, for instance,

notes that there is likely to be a greater reliance on self-help within communities and the parish and town councils could play a key role in this regard with their ability to raise precept and support projects. Similarly, Oxfordshire County Council points out that it expects local funding from parish and town councils to become more important as its transport and other capital funds are reduced and/or no longer ring-fenced. Oxfordshire County Council says that local fundraising for projects such as improved play and youth facilities is already taking place, sometimes with advice from them. On the other hand, although parish and town councils believe that they can play a key role in delivering the Big Society agenda, they are concerned about principal authorities devolving more responsibility—especially some non-statutory functions that they can no longer fund- to them without the resources to fund these devolved services. It is reported that Milfield Parish Council in Northumberland for example has just been forced to take on management of the play area in the village with little warning and had to treble the parish precept to cover the cost of insurance. Beer Parish Council (in Devon) notes that although there is an appetite for change where it is perceived to be of clear benefit to the local community, its current resources with 1.5 staff and a £15000 budget do not allow it to take on extra responsibilities.

The National Association of Local Councils (NALC), which is the recognised membership and support organisation representing 9,000 parish and town councils in England, reports that even if there has not been a direct announcement so far by some principal local authorities on their intention to devolve services, some parish and town councils are preparing for such a request. Some parish and town councils are worried about having to raise their precept to fund any devolved services because of the impact of the current economic climate on household incomes. Furthermore it warns that if the proposal to make it obligatory to have a majority vote in a referendum before any excessive council tax increase by precepting authorities was to be applied to parish and town councils, *“this would severely constrain their ability to support local community action and respond to community needs and, in extreme cases, could create inertia amongst some parish and town councils who will become unwilling to engage in Big Society initiatives.”*

Many organisations are experiencing or are expecting to see a reduction in their income from government as well as other sources. At the same time, some are experiencing a surge in demand for their services.

### **Responses to current economic and financial conditions**

Submissions provide evidence that faced with reduced resources, civil society organisations and local authorities are trying hard to ensure that the current provision of services are maintained as much as possible in a variety of ways including looking into more cost effective ways of delivery, reducing staff hours, using more volunteers, cooperating with others and/or seeking new income sources. However, in a lot of the cases they are forced to reduce their services or cut them completely. Quite often, rural areas are the first and most to suffer.

### **Remodelling services and seeking more cost effective ways of delivery including cooperating with others**

Submissions show that many are restructuring their organisation, redesigning or joining up their services, cooperating with other organisations to cope with reduced resources and increasing demand. Some examples include the following:

- The Rural Bureaux Network reports that many Bureaux are forming countywide consortia to respond to demand. They are introducing triage systems to enable more people to access an initial point of contact for advice and then signposted or referred to other organisations where more appropriate. They have also introduced access to more self help services and are now in the process of setting up a national telephone triage system called ‘Gateway’.
- Volunteer Cornwall has redesigned services to put less strain on staff since they cannot increase their numbers. They are also working more closely with other voluntary and community sector partners such as Rural Community Council and Age Concern. Although, they have been discussing with the local authority innovative and more effective ways to use resources such as council and school owned minibuses which they say are “vastly underutilised”, they have not made much progress.
- The National Federation of Young Farmers’ Clubs (NFYFC) has built and will continue to build partnerships to provide services and human resources that the organisation itself

cannot accommodate with limited staff and financial resources. In this context for example, The Children's Rights Alliance for England is supporting NFYFC's work with an under-18 year-old members' youth forum to highlight the need for children to have a voice about the services they receive.

**Case study: Cambridgeshire Citizens Advice Bureaux - Advicehub**

Advicehub is a partnership initiative led by the four Cambridgeshire Citizens Advice Bureaux, Cambridge & District, Ely, Fenland and Huntingdonshire and funded by the Big Lottery Fund. It aims to provide joined up advice services across the county, increase people's access to good quality advice particularly in remote areas and allow partners to work more effectively through innovative technologies including touch-screen kiosks, webcams and Skype phones. In rural areas, where travelling for clients is either difficult or limited, touch screen kiosks are being installed to allow clients to access information, and send an electronic form to ask for specific advice. In the future, advice sessions with specialist advisers will be possible, using webcam and Skype technology. All of this will save travelling costs and time and increase people's access to good quality advice services where and when they need it. The Advicehub Partnership Forum is currently being set up, which will explore ways in which all partners can work together and find viable solutions. The Forum will be open to all voluntary sector, statutory and commercial organisations involved in giving advice as well as public sector bodies such as libraries, patient advice and liaison service, and GP surgeries. By forming partnerships with other leading organisations in the advice sector, Advicehub is improving access to specialist advice services for people who need help to cope with a wide variety of issues. A joint referral system is one of the ways in which partnership organisations can offer a more streamlined service to clients. By achieving synergies between not-for-profit, statutory and commercial agencies, Advicehub is working to create ease of access, improved quality and better signposting to key advice services, thereby supporting the promotion of community cohesion and ways to address social exclusion.

- Action with Communities in Rural Kent is engaged in a forward planning process with its stakeholders to establish a set of relationships which use public, private and charitable sector resources more efficiently. A draft 'Forward Strategy 2011-16' will be launched for consultation in the autumn of 2010 with a view to publishing a final version in early 2011.

**Case study: North Yorkshire Rural Voice**

North Yorkshire Rural Voice (NYRV) is a partnership of 8 organisations which delivers support, advice and guidance to rural VCS groups in North Yorkshire. NYRV has a travel budget in place, but this is rather small and needs to be used carefully. Occasionally, in Ryedale, they hire out the RYEPOD (a large custom built vehicle specifically designed to take services out to the rural communities of Ryedale and accommodate a wide range of activities) to take out their Network Officers, Funding Advisers, the Police/ Fire Service, Community Accountants etc and advertise their stops prior to arrival. However they cannot do this that often as it is rather expensive. To make some savings in terms of transport, NYRV has been using (free of charge) the North Yorkshire County Council mobile libraries to visit remote rural villages. This allows NYRV to engage with groups, on an ad-hoc basis, who might not otherwise be aware of their services and to get a feel for the villages, what is already happening in that area and what support they might need. Without the mobile library they say they wouldn't be able to go to such remote rural areas on a speculative basis in search of new groups and they would be going to see groups they actually know.

- Herefordshire Council's statutory services are looking at better working practices. 'No Wrong Door' scheme, a multi-agency approach, which they have in place, for example, delivers better integrated services for children and their families. Furthermore, Herefordshire Council has embarked on a project with partners to establish where they can share facilities, improve efficiencies and work out from multi use facilities thereby saving costs. Moreover, the council has been piloting a local area initiative in the last year called 'Hearts of Herefordshire' in which with other service providers they engage with communities to establish their needs so that the delivery of required services are focused where they are actually needed and that local people have greater control over initiatives that affect them. The council also outsources many services such as grounds and highways

maintenance. This has delivered significant savings. It will consider further options for service delivery in the future.

- Ivybridge Town Council says that working in partnership with public sector partners is critical and there needs to be creative ways of working so that the organisations that still have access to funding enable other services to be maintained and improved. In this context, the town council is intending to sell the GPs that want to offer more hospital trust services in the town 2 acres land that the town council owns allowing them to bring more services into the town at a cost cheaper to the health service but more beneficial to the community. The money that the town council will get in return will be then reinvested in other community services.

### **Generating new income/looking for alternative sources of funding**

Many respondents report that they are looking at alternative sources of funding and different ways of generating income including charging fees for memberships and services, relying on their assets for income, actively seeking new grant and contract funds, and diversifying into new activities and products.

The Community Council for Berkshire, for example, reports that membership is now by subscription and is encouraging their stakeholders to pay for services. Equality South West is similarly planning to introduce service fees to fill the funding gap that will result from the withdrawal of the South West Regional Development Agency. Rural Action Yorkshire has supported community led planning on a fee paying basis. However, it is concerned about its clients' ability to pay fees in the future if funds such as from Awards for All and from parish councils that previously supported their clients to pay for these services dry up and the demand for them from others increases. Rural Action Yorkshire and Humber and Wolds Rural Community Council believe it is very unlikely that fees will replace lost grant income, with fee payments from those receiving services only covering their costs. It is concerned that introducing full fees would considerably reduce the number of 'customers' using those services and would discriminate against those most in need.

Some consider asset management and infrastructure projects will become alternative sources of income. Ivybridge Town Council, in Devon, expects that its reliance on raising money via the precept should change as some of the services it is providing, such as Watermark, hopefully become cost neutral and ultimately profitable.

#### **Case study: Ivybridge Town Council - Watermark**

Ivybridge Town Council built Watermark, an events and conference venue located in the town centre, after purchasing land and securing funding from various sources (including Devon County Council, South Hams District Council, Devon Renaissance and European Regional Development Fund). Watermark is home to an information centre, helping with enquiries related to tourist, community and Town Council information; a library; a learning suite with 12 computers and broadband access; a large multi-purpose hall for events, conferences, cinema and theatre which is available for hire to individuals and organisations that would like to hold events; a multi-purpose conference room available for hire; and an innovation centre hosting 16 purpose built offices for hire.

A self-employed adviser on housing and renewable energy issues in North Northumberland, also reports that local communities in his area are taking matters into their own hands by developing community owned electricity and power generation to use the profits to fund services. However, he highlights that the project will take 10 years to deliver any return and raises questions about who will provide the funding, as the project requires borrowing hundreds of thousands of pounds for set up costs in addition to over £1 million.

Some others are expanding or diversifying their services, activities or products. Action with Communities for Rural Kent for instance reports that when its public sector income dropped by 48% at the start of 2008/2009 it had to be entrepreneurial and opportunistic in seeking alternative sources of income, often delivering to urban areas to be able to subsidise delivery in rural areas such as community-led planning and, particularly, the Rural Housing Enabler service.

### **Case study: Tablehurst Farm Community Supported Agriculture**

Tablehurst Farm CSA is a social enterprise in Forest Row, East Sussex, primarily rearing beef cattle, sheep, pigs and poultry and selling their meat through the farm shop and wholesale. It also trains young people in farming and butchery skills and provides a care home for three adults, who live on the farm and participate actively in the day-to-day work. 75% of its income comes from trading. Concern about a potential downturn in demand for meat since Autumn 2008 has led Tablehurst Farm to diversify its products and activities including pies and horticulture. This has created two jobs and maintained the farm's income. Tablehurst Farm is now planning to start a cafe and small bakery to underpin its viability and, potentially to help other farms who cannot sell their produce.

Many others are looking for grant funding from other sources. However, they are experiencing difficulty as there are fewer grants to bid for and more demand for funding support. The Rural Bureaux Network, for example, reports that many bureaux are currently looking for alternative sources of funding to keep rural services going. However, a lot of them are struggling to find new sources when many of the usual sources are being cut or withdrawn and where those remaining ones are experiencing an unprecedented rise in demand from charities for financial support. Ashworth Time Bank, similarly says grants from other sources are no longer available, making grant fundraising extremely difficult. Likewise, Cumbria Rural Housing Trust, a small charity working with rural communities and partners in Cumbria to research the level and type of need for affordable housing and find solutions to the lack of affordable housing, notes that they are seeking other funding from charitable sources –not very successfully- and from other local authorities and the county –again –not very successfully. Its Land Development Trust Officer adds that bureaucracy associated with applying for grants causes great difficulty particularly for smaller organisations with limited resources.

*“Grant investment tends to be narrowly specialised, tortuous to access and competitive rather than generally available. Often short lived programmes have lengthy application procedures with no guaranteed outcome. This wastes volunteer time and energy. Many community projects would by now have been delivered were it not for the difficulty of accessing government investment. Crucially these schemes tend to be entirely RISK AVERSE which means that fewer projects get off the ground and less experience is gained.”* (Land Development Trust Officer, Cumbria Rural Housing Trust)

### **Reduction or total loss in services**

Against this backdrop of declining income, raised expectancy and higher demands for support and services, respondents have shown real concerns about the sustainability of civil society organisations and their services, unless they have access to sufficient funds. There is a widespread fear that civil society organisations will have to reduce their services considerably or stop operating altogether.

*“With the threat to core and project funding already apparent there is a danger that many community and voluntary groups will have to restrict their activities or close altogether. As well as the loss of vital services, this will result in a loss of expertise and infrastructure on which Big Society initiatives could build.”* (Rural Bureaux Network)

Some have already had to cut back on their activities. Cumbria Rural Housing Trust, for example reports that it has reduced staff hours and is saying ‘no’ to request for help from communities. Yorkshire and the Humber Rural Network reports some VCS groups that are affected by funding cuts had to reduce staff and close office facilities. The ones that are still operating are leaning increasingly more on their remaining staff to try to do more with less but they cannot operate on the level they had previously done which results in users receiving less services or none at all. The Archway Foundation had to curtail services and put on hold the roll out of its services to the rural communities of the Vale and South Oxfordshire.

Many others expect to reduce their services significantly in the future unless further income is found. RISE, reports that training, and learning/networking opportunities for social enterprise



business advisers may disappear altogether. Lincolnshire Credit Union says that many rural credit unions will truly struggle and face an immense challenge to maintain their services. Ash-worth Time Bank which has already had to scale down older people's social groups in villages, reports that that its services will have to cease operating if it does not receive funding. It is worried that old people in rural areas which are experiencing limited access to transport as well as advice and information will become even more isolated as a result of this.

*“A reduction in income can lead to reduced staff resources and services, leaving young people unsupported. All YFC members are volunteers and lack of support could jeopardise the service of a vibrant social and skills network that operates effectively in rural areas. Positive stimulation of young people through a programme of organised activities creates a culture of learning, contributing to society and good citizenship. The downside of a reduction in income is the possibility of disengagement and more NEETS if rural youth is not supported.”* (National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs)

Indeed, there is widespread fear that rural communities are going to be increasingly and disproportionately hit by cuts. This view has been expressed by national public bodies and local authorities; national and regional networks of civil society organisations, and from Citizens Advice Bureaux, Rural Community Councils and voluntary organisations. Such concern is regularly accompanied by representations that due to the high cost of delivering services (distance travelled, time spent travelling and the related transport staffing costs), low returns (in terms of number of people interacted with) and lack of visibility of deprivation in rural areas, programmes and services in rural areas are often the first to be reduced or axed during periods of funding cuts with the result that services are concentrated in urban centres.

*“In Yorkshire and the Humber, many of the local authorities and public service providers are predominantly urban in nature with the result that their readiness to prioritise rural needs is low or patchy. We are having some success recently in promoting rural concerns with these agencies and in engaging with them in exploring how they can respond better. It is extremely likely that, as their own resources are reduced, their capacity to attend to this policy area will reduce and their focus will return to service delivery aimed at areas of concentrated need or demand, that is, urban areas. It would be impossible for us to increase our role in supporting these services or in running community services without funding to that end.* (Rural Action Yorkshire)

Despite their efforts to maintain services, the Rural Bureaux Network reports that many bureaux have already had to cut their services in rural areas. This has led in turn to longer waiting times for clients, clients having to travel further to access advice, the removal of home visiting services and the complete closure of some rural services. In 2010 the Rural Bureaux Network surveyed its members on the reality or expectation of funding cuts. This revealed that in the last year 66% of CAB respondents had received specific funding to run rural services such as outreach and home visiting services. In the last 12 months 73% of the respondents said that they had to reduce a service to a rural community because of funding cuts. Half of all responders to this survey were expecting to introduce further cuts to rural services over the next 12 months due to anticipated loss of funding.

Responses from individual CABs, further demonstrate the scale of present and expected cuts to services in rural areas and the problems this may cause:

- Fenland CAB has withdrawn all specialist and most generalist services in two of the market towns, as well as all home visits for clients who do not qualify under their Macmillan or RBL projects. This has left rurally-isolated clients, often elderly, with no access to face to face advice and assistance. The Bureau also notes that more and more services are not available locally. For instance, anyone needing specialist advice in two of the market towns now has to travel almost 10 miles in an area which is very poorly served by public transport. If they do not have or cannot afford a car, they cannot access face-to-face advice.
- Ashfield CAB reports that they will go from a vibrant bureau with 11 staffs, 40 volunteers and 7 outreaches to 3 part time management/administration staff, a part-time caseworker, some volunteers and no outreaches, if funding is cut as currently proposed.
- West Lindsey CAB notes that debt advice in the rural areas will cease in December due to funding unless they can source alternative funding.

- Blackpool CAB reports that Wyre District CAB is facing closure as the local authority has withdrawn funding for many voluntary groups in the area including them. This will jeopardise the provision of the telephone advice service serving particularly the rural areas of the district, as the Big Lottery Fund (which has indicated that it may withdraw the funding if the local authority does) will not fund core activities in Wyre.

Public bodies also voice concerns about cuts to rural services. Herefordshire Council recognises that many rural services have already been reduced or lost due to existing funding constraints and further funding cuts will adversely affect those living in rural areas as particularly rural public transport may need to be cut back further and non-statutory services such as library provision may need to be reviewed. Sheffield City Council similarly reports that funding cuts will make it difficult to respond to the needs of the rural community.

Remploy, an NDPB, is one of the UK's leading providers of specialist employment services for disabled people and those experiencing complex barriers to work with over 3,500 local and national employer partnerships. Remploy warns that as the Welfare to Work agenda is changing to a payment for results model with little or no upfront funding, there will be a greater temptation by service providers to concentrate their efforts on those areas where demand for their service is high, where they already have a presence from which to deliver their service, and therefore where they can maximise their outcomes with minimum expenditure. This will lead to providers focusing on urban areas and further moving away from providing specific delivery in rural areas.

*“As contracts are cancelled and niche programmes disappear the economics of high volume delivery do not lend themselves to specific delivery within the rural communities. Consequently there is not the imperative to provide specific services within the rural communities. There is a lower demand for our services in the rural community by the very fact there is a lesser volume of need as such it almost becomes acceptable to concentrate effort on those areas where we can get a greater return on our investment such as the inner city and urban areas. Rural communities are deemed the areas of acceptable attrition as the funding cuts bite and providers are asked to deliver more volume outcomes for less.”* (Remploy)

Reported concerns about the effect of funding cuts on rural areas, were heightened for rural areas of poor service provision. The prospect is raised that funding cuts will leave areas with no service providers where access to nearest service is also hampered by poor transport links and broadband connectivity. Oxfordshire County Council reports that potential cuts in grants to voluntary community and faith partners providing a service such as community transport schemes, would threaten the development of these projects as alternatives to subsidised bus services. OCC also report that similar issues arise for organisations supporting volunteer-run youth clubs and projects that often provide the only service of that kind in rural areas. West Northumberland CAB warns that if they have to cut or close their services, results for the rural communities will be devastating as there are little or no alternative service suppliers; advisers can travel 100 miles across ‘patch’ to see clients.

Moreover, due to lack of broadband or fast broadband speeds there is a risk that some rural communities will be further isolated as public bodies as well as civil society organisations increasingly rely on the internet and innovative technologies to provide some of their services to save money. Herefordshire Council, for example, reports that its residents in many parts of the county are adversely affected by the lack of fast broadband and mobile phone coverage and that unless investment is made now, the county will not be able to benefit from many of the innovations which depend on high broadband speeds, such as telemedicine. North Yorkshire Rural Voice says that because many of the VCS that are located in remote rural areas do not have broadband, their officer has to rely on face-to-face meetings, letters and telephone communication. Also these organisations cannot access the online resources such as the Charity Commission website.

## Conclusions and recommendations

Rural England has a wide variety of organisations and activities, offering evidence that the Big Society approach is already embedded in many rural communities. These civil organisations welcome the Big Society concept and believe they are well placed to deliver its ambitions. At the same time, many have concerns about their capacity to take on more responsibility, not least because of the effects, and anticipation, of funding cuts. To date many have been able to absorb cuts in income and ensure that provision of services is maintained as much as possible by cooperating with others and/or seeking new sources of income. However, others have been forced to reduce their services or withdraw them completely. Several respondents to our call for evidence expressed and illustrated their concerns that further cuts will have a significant impact on the organisations and upon vulnerable rural groups and communities.

From their experience organisations that responded to our plans for this report, have set out several requests and proposals for central government and public sector decision makers to address to improve the adoption of the Big Society in rural areas.

They would like:

1. To have more information on the Big Society, including clarity on the following:
  - how the Big Society will be supported (including financially);
  - how the role of local authorities is going to be affected (to help civil society organisations understand their future role in relationship to local authorities);
  - clarification of the government's understanding of the role of voluntary and community services in relation to new community organisers and community grants;
  - what are the expectations of joint working between the local authorities and the voluntary and community sector;
  - who should deliver essential services in rural areas and how this would happen; and
  - the future of the Compact and its significance in relation to the Big Society.
2. The actions and the experiences of civil society and the local parish and town councils need to be recognised, celebrated, supported and built on.
3. Central and local government should avoid dismantling what works, 'reinventing the wheel' and duplicating efforts.
4. Mechanisms to be put in place to ensure that vulnerable groups' voices can be heard when building the Big Society.
5. The government to understand that the Big Society, although cost efficient, is not cost free and that some communities do not have the capacity to get involved. Ongoing and long term funding as well as professional support is still needed to carry on delivering their services and taking on additional responsibilities.
6. Funding to be made accessible with simpler application and management processes, including the adoption of more standardised processes to save organisations their scarce time and resources and encourage them to get involved in new projects.
7. The government to take measures to ensure that civil society organisations are not viewed as soft targets when implementing spending cuts. This might include ring fencing of funds that are passed down from the central government to local authorities to be allocated to the Big Society or civil society sector.
8. Similarly they ask the government and public sector leaders to ensure that vulnerable groups are not disproportionately affected by spending cuts. Where new funds are created this should be incorporated into the design and availability, for example through an uplift for delivering the Department for Work and Pensions' work programme to workless job seekers in remote rural localities to ensure that it is economically viable for providers to continue to offer a service in rural areas. Some also stress the importance of continuing small grant schemes for organisations operating in rural areas.

9. Local government should avoid using the Big Society as an opportunity to transfer out some of their functions and teams in competition with existing civil society organisations.
10. Local authorities and other public bodies should be encouraged to carry out and support asset transfers for long term social and financial outcomes not just short term cash receipts.
11. Recognition that volunteering, either for service delivery or within communities is crucial to the success of the Big Society, and is not cost free. The evidence and comments received for this report emphasise that volunteers are not free, that training, supervision, travel, and meeting of regulations all cost money, and those who seek to build the Big Society on organisations with great dependency on volunteers need to support these costs.
12. At the same time traditional models of volunteering, while successful, may not draw in individuals who would like to give some time to their community without being tied into a formal arrangement. Civil society organisations operating in rural areas should be encouraged even challenged, to consider alternative approaches and models and become more innovative. People want to get involved but need assistance to understand what they can do and how they can get involved.
13. Recognition and support for social enterprise and civil society infrastructure organisations and teams of specialists who have demonstrated their value to local organisations as well as public sector. These might face funding challenges due to disappearing regional agencies, so that the baby is not thrown out with the bath water.
14. Respondents emphasise an ongoing need for more of the public sector to acknowledge that deprivation is a rural as well as an urban challenge; that some communities and some issues such as debt, benefit and employability still needs face to face advice; that distance and sparsity add costs to working in some rural areas which needs to be built into funding, and that local infrastructure, premises and partners in rural areas need to be given equal access to funds and resources to support the Big Society for the wider rural community.

## **Annex 1: case studies to illustrate the breadth of Big Society operations in rural England**

### **The Bay Broadband Co-operative**

The Bay Broadband Co-operative provides broadband to the residents and visitors of Robin Hood's Bay in North Yorkshire. Remote villages and farms enjoy a reliable and high quality broadband connection through a wi-fi mesh of up to 8 megabits. Members pay £8 a month for the service. The visitors to the area also can purchase a temporary connection to the system for between £3 a day to £10 a week. The co-operative survives on its income and is currently making a sustainable profit.

### **Pub is the Hub**

Pub is the Hub is a not-for-profit organisation which helps support the needs of the communities by offering specialist advice on the diversification or community ownership of pubs so that they can provide valuable local services, such as village shops, post office services, IT training, or advice and community centres at the heart of their community. It works in rural areas where there are no services for the community or where existing services are under threat, and their loss will result in significant social or economic disadvantage to local people. Pub is the Hub encourages rural pub owners, licensees and local communities to work together to support, retain and locate services within the pub which can in many cases improve the viability of the pub itself. It also gives advice on project funding and the best way to progress with each individual project. Pub is the Hub's services are free of charge to licensees and individuals within rural communities. The formation of Pub is the Hub was inspired by its Founder Patron HRH the Prince of Wales and since 2005 has evolved as a national programme with 7 Regional Advisory Hubs and over 100 people volunteering their time and experience.

### **Real Ideas Organisation: Cultivate**

Developed by the Real Ideas Organisation (RIO), a social enterprise based in the south west, Cultivate is a brand new approach to rural youth provision where young people are provided with the support and inspiration to identify and develop activities they would like to engage with. Through Cultivate, young people become directly involved in and take ownership of the activity, link up with local talent and knowledge, and trigger changes in themselves, their community and the perception of young people. Each Cultivate area is appointed with a Cultivator – a local person with drive, passion and in depth knowledge of their community- which work with the young people and connect them with local organisations, businesses and skills to help young people turn their ideas into reality. During the pilot phase, which was completed in 2009, Cultivate worked across nine areas and directly with up to 40 young people in each area. The activities ranged from exhibitions, dance and music workshops to building a skate park. RIO is currently working on how to turn this pilot project into a social enterprise with young people to make it sustainable.

### **St. Leonard's, Yarpole, Herefordshire**

The Mission and Public Affairs Council of the Achibishops' Council of the Church of England notes that there are 9,639 church buildings in rural England. In some areas, the church is the last remaining building that is open to public and as such provides a valuable public space for a variety of activities such as meetings, IT training, concerts and exhibitions. Also, in various instances, the church has become the place where a post office or village shop is permanently located. St. Leonard's in Yarpole, Herefordshire is a good example of where the community, church and local authorities have worked together to keep their village shop open by moving it to their church in the village centre.

Yarpole is a small rural village with a population of only 700. Following the closure of the village shop, a co-operative was set up in a temporary port cabin behind the local pub. However, with the threat of planning permission for the temporary shop expiring, a Community Building Project group including representatives of the church, shop, parish council and village hall committee was set up to discuss different proposals to locate the village shop permanently in the church. The proposals were later exhibited in the church, a public meeting was held and a detailed questionnaire was sent out to residents. Following a response from around one third of households, 85% of which supported the proposals, the plan was prepared by a local team comprising an architect and conservation surveyor. The project cost approximately £ 240,000 which was funded by fundraising and grants secured from 13 different bodies including Herefordshire Council which was the largest single funder. A paid shop manager and post master was appointed but otherwise the shop relies on a rotation of around 50 volunteers.

### **Sustainable Wallingford: The Greening Campaign**

Sustainable Wallingford is a community group formed in 2003 by people living in and around the small Oxfordshire town of Wallingford. Since it was founded, Sustainable Wallingford has become well known locally for a range of activities that involve local people in initiatives to live more sustainably and reduce their Co2.

In November 2008, Sustainable Wallingford held a Climate Change Survey to which over 560 households in the town replied. Analysis of the feedback provided one really consistent response. People said they would be motivated to take action to cut CO<sub>2</sub> if they knew they were not acting on their own and were part of the collective impact of the whole town's activity. To respond to this, Sustainable Wallingford linked to 'The Greening Campaign' a national initiative which started in Petersfield in Hampshire to motivate people to reduce their energy consumption and lower their carbon footprint. The campaign offers a simple way to involve the whole community, capture the carbon saving activities that people are undertaking and demonstrates the value of everyone coming together to share what they are doing to act on climate change. The campaign was so successful that it and grew over time to include over 180 communities all over England with more joining every week.

In Wallingford the Campaign has been hugely successful. Following an extensive publicity campaign which secured the wide involvement of all sections of the community, including the schools, faith groups, Town Council, businesses and a raft of community organisations, Sustainable

Wallingford launched the Campaign in October 2009 and have so far had 759 households (over 2,000 people) sign up to be part of the campaign. This is 24.9% of the population and more are joining through events and activities.

Following on from this initial programme, and supported by the Greening Campaign, Wallingford plans to undertake further activities, which will continue to work with the community to further reduce their CO<sub>2</sub> through:

- a focus on insulation and retrofit;
- installing solar panels and other household renewable generation devices; and
- developing a Wallingford community renewable energy project as a social enterprise to bring in income which can be reinvested in the community to help them undertake retrofit, insulation and renewable energy generation.

### **The Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group: The Parish Approach**

The Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) is a national environmental charity which has a network of approximately 100 conservation advisers spread around the UK. Through its advisers it works with farmers and landowners to encourage them to conserve and enhance their natural environment while maintaining and strengthening their businesses and competitiveness in Europe.

FWAG has developed with partners a methodology, the Parish Approach with a view to enable the delivery of European environmental targets and strategic frameworks by supporting communities to lead on the delivery of the protection of their local environment. FWAG believes that currently although people within communities want to contribute and be involved, they are held back by the complexity of processes and governance. In this context, the Parish Approach offers a simple delivery model which could be replicated in other areas as well as environmental conservation. It is based on valuing people, respecting their knowledge and connectivity to a place, enabling them to come together as a community to lead on every aspect of environmental protection and social cohesion. It is led by the local representatives for that administrative area, with the support of all partner organisations and in consultation with the residents of that area.

This approach is proposed as an alternative to other approaches that tend to operate around national organisations, strategies and policy frameworks and quite often in isolation from each other, resulting in alienation of the communities as well as duplication of efforts.

### **Turning Point: Connected Care, Brandon, Suffolk**

Turning Point is a large social enterprise which provides services for people with complex needs including those affected by drug and alcohol misuse, mental health problems and those with a learning disability from 200 locations throughout England and Wales.

Connected Care is Turning Point's model for community led commissioning that is built on community engagement to identify weaknesses in service-provision and build a user-led response to address these limitations. This model aims to deliver better services that meet community needs whilst addressing cost inefficiencies associated with duplication, wastage and failing services. The model works in seven stages:

- establishing a steering group including health, housing and social care commissioners, Connected Care staff and community researchers;
- conducting desk-based research which draws together knowledge of local population needs, their experiences of health and social care and information about the profile of existing services;
- identifying suitable members of the community and training them as researchers;
- interviewing between 10 and 15 per cent of the local community who have complex needs through door to door surveys, online surveys, face to face semi-structured interviews, stakeholder groups and events; events encouraging people to have their say;
- analysing the findings and reporting to the steering group and local commissioners who use the reports to understand the changes needed in health and social care provision;
- (Turning Point) working alongside commissioners to design bespoke integrated health, housing and social care services; and
- evaluation of the results including a cost-benefit analysis.

Connected Care Suffolk which is jointly commissioned by the Department of Health Eastern Region Social Care and Partnerships team, Suffolk County Council and NHS Suffolk is the first time the model has been tested in a rural area (Brandon). Brandon is a small town with a population of 8,700. It is located in the northwest corner of Suffolk, close to the border of Norfolk. Residents often have to travel around 10 miles to access health and social care services.

When the community researchers interviewed the residents of Brandon about their perceptions of health and social services they found out that in Brandon there is a lack of social capital; residents face difficulties accessing services due to rural town's location and public transport provision; residents would like to have easily available and clear information on the services in their local areas and healthy living; they also would like to see services working more closely with one another and more services located in Brandon preferably under one roof.

Several recommendations were made on the basis of these findings including building a Healthy Living Centre, improving transport provision, provision of better and more accessible information on health and social care services. In fact, the centre was originally commissioned 10 years ago, long before Connected Care was involved but it has experienced many delays. Following Connected Care's audit, Healthy Living Centre came back on the agenda and plans were taken forward

The current designs for the Healthy Living Centre include GP surgeries being based on the top floor and on the ground floor rooms for social care workers and some community space, including a new library and a hall that could be used for community functions. There is also a space for a community café. Unfortunately, with recent cuts, the project is now at risk again, but Connected Care is hoping that the commissioners will find a way to make it work and open it soon.

### **Volunteer Cornwall: Viva**

Viva (Volunteering in Vulnerable Adults), is an initiative run by Volunteer Cornwall and supported by Cornwall Council's Adult Care & Support Directorate which enables and supports adults with a physical, mental, learning or sensory disability and people with long term illness to volunteer and become engaged within their community. It allows people who are classified as 'vulnerable' to undertake meaningful activity, expand their experiences and social networks and helps them live a more integrated life, all of which contrasts to the old fashioned approach of treating them as passive recipients. Since the project was launched in 2007, viva officer has supported almost 400 people into volunteering and set up a team of viva volunteers who help out at events around the county. Viva has also enabled partners to see where things can be done in a more different and flexible way. As a result of this, more innovative activity is happening now in Cornwall to support vulnerable adults and Volunteer Cornwall has been able to work with other charities as well as public sector bodies to develop new projects and bid for funds. As a result of the project's success, Volunteer Cornwall has recently been approached by Cornwall Council asking for them to second three members of their staff.

### **Annex 2: submissions were received, with thanks, from:**

Action with Communities in Rural Kent (The Rural Community Council for Kent & Medway)  
Advice Daventry (Citizens Advice Bureau)  
Afghan Action  
Ashfield Citizens Advice Bureau (Nottinghamshire)  
Amble Development Trust (Northumberland)  
Ash-worth Time Bank (Cheshire)  
Blackpool Citizens Advice Bureau

Cambridge & District Citizens Advice Bureau  
 Churches Regional Commission for Yorkshire and the Humber  
 Cirencester Housing for Young People  
 Citizens Advice North Norfolk  
 Community Council for Berkshire  
 Cumbria Rural Housing Trust  
 Dorset Community Action  
 Enterprise South West Shropshire  
 Equality South West  
 Fenland Citizens Advice Bureau  
 Forest of Dean Citizens Advice Bureau  
 Herefordshire Council  
 Horses Helping People ( Buckinghamshire)  
 Humber and Wolds Rural Community Council  
 Lincolnshire Credit Union  
 Milecastle Housing Ltd (Tynedale)  
 National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs (NFYFC)  
 Northumberland Credit Union Ltd.  
 North Yorkshire Rural Voice  
 Oxfordshire County Council  
 Pub is the Hub  
 Real Ideas Organisation (Plymouth)  
 Remploy  
 Retired business executive involved in community projects (Navenby, Lincolnshire)  
 RISE (South West)  
 Rural Action Yorkshire  
 Rural Bureaux Network (CAB)  
 Rural Cornwall & Isles Of Scilly Partnership  
 Rural Partnership Plus (The Humber)  
 Self-employed adviser on housing and renewable energy issues (North Northumberland)  
 Sheffield City Council  
 Social Enterprise Yorkshire and the Humber  
 South East Rural Towns Partnership  
 South Tynedale Railway Preservation Society  
 South Yorkshire Rural Network  
 Swineshead Village Hall (Bedfordshire)  
 Sustainable Wallingford (Oxfordshire)  
 Tablehurst Farm CSA (East Sussex)  
 The Archway Foundation (Oxfordshire)  
 The Church of England Archbishops Council (Mission and Public Affairs Division)  
 The Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG)  
 The National Association of Local Councils, including submissions from Beer Parish Council, Hurley  
 Parish Council, Ivybridge Town Council, Petersfield Town Council, St Martin's Parish Council,  
 Woolfardisworthy West Parish Council  
 University of Gloucestershire, Department of Natural & Social Sciences  
 Voluntary Action North Lincolnshire  
 Volunteer Cornwall  
 West Berkshire Citizens Advice Bureau  
 West Lindsey Citizens Advice Bureau  
 West Northumberland Citizens Advice Bureau  
 West Yorkshire Rural Infrastructure Support System,  
 Workers' Educational Association North East region, Take Part Northumberland Project  
 Yorkshire Rural Support Network  
 Yorkshire and the Humber Rural Network

plus comments provided on our website