

Big City, Big Society



Birmingham's Prospectus for the Big Society



1. Foreword by Mike Whitby, Leader, Birmingham City Council



We believe Birmingham is the birthplace of the original 'Big Society', a philosophy which resonates throughout our city's history and culture. Our forefathers, civic entrepreneurs and businessmen like Joseph

Chamberlain and the Cadburys, transformed our city through innumerable civic innovations. Their efforts brought about tangible improvements to the quality of life enjoyed by all the city's residents, and made Birmingham a place envied across the world. They truly bridged the gaps between the public, private and third sectors – and reinvented the rules as they did so. They were non-conformists, philanthropists, the pioneers of the adult school movement, and they left in their wake a new way of approaching public services. Today, it is only right that Birmingham continues that proud tradition.

In fact it's in our blood; and we know the Big Society is about much more than

reinvigorating our social and community relationships. As Chamberlain showed, it's also about creating a more dynamic and enterprising economy. Supporting businesses, building social capital and community cohesion, exploring new ways of delivering services and helping the city to be more economically competitive - will all enhance quality of life and increase Birmingham's capacity to grow and succeed.

In putting together our Prospectus we have reviewed Big Society activity across Birmingham and have been overwhelmed by how much is naturally taking place. From the Sikh community coming together with 1000s of hours of volunteering to build Birmingham's first Free School, to the sophisticated network of 120 ward Councillors - empowered with delegated budgets – supporting local community programmes. For many people the value of the Government's focus on the Big Society has been to provide these hard-working communities with the recognition they deserve.

We know the emphasis of a strong Big Society is in empowering our communities, businesses and the third sector; in a sense, therefore, it is not about Local Authorities. Equally, however, we know that our City Council is ideally placed to bring these groups together. We have the asset base, the skills and the expertise to drive the agenda forward. We know that if we use our influence and powers appropriately, we can encourage a new generation of civic entrepreneurs, align the skills of business to the appetite and inventiveness of the local community, inspire communities to take more responsibility and empower people to make the most of the assets that, after all, are the people's anyway.

Our Prospectus, therefore, points the way forward for the City Council and the city. We have a formidable base upon which to build, and in many ways see ourselves as being ahead of the game, but we want to achieve more. We believe that in recognising the future role of the Council, and focusing our actions around three key objectives: Achieving cultural change; Creating sustainable and stronger neighbourhoods; and Promoting responsibility; over the next 12 months we will make a

further step-change. This is not about budgets or a contraction in public sector funding, it is about all of us coming together to do better for the people of Birmingham.

In many ways the challenge of the Big Society is a familiar challenge for Birmingham, and so the national drive for a stronger 'Big Society' is one that we welcome with open arms. We don't believe a successful 'Big Society' needs to be based around 'Big Budgets' – but we know it needs 'Big Hearts', a commitment from the communities which can, and will, drive forward new and improved ways of doing things. Looking to our forefathers for inspiration, building on our experiences from the past, using the considerable tools the City Council has at its disposal, I believe Birmingham will continue to be an exemplar.

Mike Whitby, born and educated in Birmingham, has held the position of Leader of Birmingham City Council since 2004. Owner and Managing Director of a local engineering company, he is also a fellow of the Institute of Directors and leading board member of the Greater Birmingham & Solihull LEP, Marketing Birmingham and the NEC.

2. Foreword by Phillip Blond, Director, ResPublica



British civil society is something to be proud of. Our past reveals great philanthropic characters and enthused civic activists, innovative entrepreneurs and public service deliverers. Civic association

opens up endless opportunities – through social networks, ‘bottom up’ local institutions and new types of partnership between citizens and councils, genuine transformation can take place in our communities. Civic association is not simply the ‘by-product’ of our economic activities; it embodies the very core of our societies and acts as both architect and foundation to social and economic renewal.

The city of Birmingham encapsulates and personifies this tradition. It has acted as a platform for innovation and social responsibility, hosting civic pioneers such as the Cadbury family and the genius of James Watt. Birmingham also has a history of strong civic pride, cultivated particularly by its own Joseph Chamberlain who rightly prized the importance of start-up businesses and the inherent value of place and locality.

This legacy has clearly continued within Birmingham today. I recently had the pleasure of witnessing this first hand, visiting centres of civic activism and social renewal across the city. The joyful enthusiasm I experienced was positively overwhelming, and indeed, deeply encouraging for a supporter of the ‘Big Society’. The wealth of community capital has already made its mark in Birmingham, accomplishing much for residents and local neighbourhoods.

Hutton Hall, within the Hutton Estate, offers an excellent platform for the community, tapping into underused skills and giving people a central space which they can come to own and enjoy. As a community asset, its potential is unlimited and its achievements in crime reduction and education already very real.

St. George’s community hub in Newtown, Aston ward, has a parallel impact. It offers public space for various interactions to take place, but also valuable office space to host an array of local support services. Unique to the hub is its ability to pool local resources and skills and broker relationships, allowing it – and the community – to achieve much, much more. In building the community around

them and creating greater social networks, Birmingham's community hubs are undoubtedly civic pioneers of their time.

But there is clearly a role also for the local council and the state. The 'Big Society' is not reducible to 'volunteering', and neither does it claim to be a panacea for cuts. Rather, it opens up the opportunity for the state to re-shape its public services and broker the wealth of social capital and human reciprocity latent within our communities.

Chamberlain was one of the first to position Birmingham council as the vehicle through which such relationships could be fostered. For him, philanthropy and charitable voluntarism was not solely a matter for the private and personal spheres, but concerned the very heart and agency of the local council. Whilst on my tour around the city of Birmingham, it was clear that Birmingham City Council had already embarked on

recreating and recasting this role for the 21st century. But there is still much that could be done to extend and deepen this activity, laying the groundwork for continuing the civic renewal of one of Britain's greatest cities as is clearly and innovatively set out in this prospectus, which I both endorse and am delighted by.

By encouraging participative practice, brokering voluntary association and incentivising entrepreneurship and business innovation, Birmingham City Council can once again pioneer an associative and grassroots approach to resurrect and cultivate its inherited civic state.

Phillip Blond is the Director of the think tank ResPublica and a research fellow at NESTA. Phillip is an internationally recognised political thinker, and economic and cultural commentator. He has been described as a driving force behind David Cameron's Big Society agenda.

Community Sports Hubs

Birmingham is piloting the involvement of community groups and sports organisations in the running of leisure facilities, to be known as Community Sports Hubs. The first pilot is taking place at an unattached playing field in Perry Barr where the group will coordinate activity at the playing field and eventually manage it under a community asset transfer. This has the potential for bringing under-used sports assets like playing fields back into operation whilst stimulating more community organised sporting activity. A further three pilots are also underway.

The Sweet Project

The Sweet Project is a social enterprise that works with disadvantaged children, young people, adults and families in south Birmingham, providing them with social work support. The project trains social work students to become better social workers by giving them real cases to work on – delivering early intervention support. It works with more than 100 students every year and in its first twelve months has supported more than 150 families and 300 children. The project is a recent winner of the Prime Minister's Big Society Award.

Nishkam Primary School

The Nishkam Primary School is one of the first flagship free schools which opened in September with an intake of 180 pupils. The school is Sikh-led but at least half its places will be offered to non-Sikh children. The new school building has been transformed from two old nightclubs with the help of large teams of local volunteers.

Balsall Heath Forum

Balsall Heath Forum is a neighbourhood group that has been instrumental in transforming Balsall Heath from a depressed and crime ridden area with poor community cohesion to one which is green, clean and thriving with a strong sense of community. Balsall Heath has been selected as a Big Society Vanguard piloting a neighbourhood budget. The neighbourhood budget aims to pool together different funding streams across the area, in order to give the community greater influence over how resource is spent to tackle social problems and to support a more local approach to commissioning from civil society organisations. Balsall Heath has also been selected by Government to trial Neighbourhood Planning powers and produce a neighbourhood development plan.

3. Big Society, Big City: Birmingham's distinctive approach

Birmingham's heritage, resources and connections provide the basis for our vision for "the Big City". The culture and traditions of non-conformism, enterprise and inventiveness make the city a fertile ground for the development of the Big Society more widely.

Birmingham City Council is firmly committed to growing a Big Society and many things we, our partners and other organisations do have already made a significant contribution to this. We recognise however that we are not there yet; we need to do more to develop social responsibility amongst our citizens, to create opportunities and support communities to get involved in finding solutions to local problems and to give people more control over their lives whilst ensuring the interests of all our citizens are represented. This is reflected in the Council's Making a Contribution strategic priority which is about citizens, organisations and businesses taking personal and collective action to improve communities.

We have a vision of a city that is stronger and "bigger" in every way – a city whose individuals, communities and businesses are empowered to work together to achieve big results. This is not just a city with more volunteering and social responsibility – though these are key ingredients - it is a city with a radically different approach to public services that can support a more dynamic and creative economy.

If we are to help create a Big City and a Big Society then the role of the city council and all the local public services must change. It will no longer be primarily about delivering standard services, though many of these remain vital elements of local public life. Instead the focus will be on increasing the capacity of the city as a whole to achieve shared outcomes. Supporting businesses, building the capacity of community and voluntary organisations, increasing social capital and community cohesion, fostering new markets in service provision, and helping

the city to compete will all improve the ability of the city to achieve outcomes.

This will be based on supporting the development of networks of connections both within and beyond the city – connections that can nurture the innovation and cultural exchange that drives prosperity - extending from local communities to business sectors to the global economy.

Critically, we don't believe the Big Society is about budgets or contractions in public sector

spending. It is about daring to do things differently and better – something we've been doing for generations, in times of austerity and times of surplus. Our driver, as with everything we do, is about improving the lives and experiences of all Birmingham's citizens. We know the public sector will be smaller, and there are things perhaps which we the Council used to do directly which others are now better placed to do, but that doesn't mean people will experience poorer outcomes, or that services will stop improving.

Witton Lodge Community Association (WLCA)

WLCA is a civic society group that has been involved in piloting community asset transfer and development in Birmingham. The City Council passed proceeds from land sold on the estate to the Association to build homes for rent. With the funds raised from the sale of land and borrowing, WLCA has invested in community assets as well as in local housing. It has used its physical asset base to develop community services and activities on the estate including a pioneering Community Watch scheme and has taken on the leasehold ownership of the local community centre from the City Council.



4. Delivering more for less in the Big City

Our vision is essentially about achieving better outcomes even with less funding. This can be achieved by various means:

- Providing more **choice** to our residents through new ways of delivering our services. For example: by redesigning services to enable users to do more for themselves, particularly through using new information technologies which saves money and empowers the user at the same time; service users given personal budgets and choice will often make more prudent decisions on the use of resources.
- Handing over more **power** to our residents. For example through community co-production where working more closely with communities in the design and delivery of services can achieve significant reductions in crime and anti-social behaviour, litter and graffiti, expensive housing repairs and other costs to the public sector. Transferring publicly owned

assets builds skills, knowledge and experience within communities enabling them to become stronger and more independent. Introducing community budgets with shared support services and pooled budgets can enable us to design new and re-design existing services which better meet community needs. This also includes introducing measures to improve our transparency and therefore our accountability.

- Working with communities to **prevent** future demand for services, makes good financial sense. Making a radical shift in focus towards preventative activities and away from expensive acute services leads to healthier and stronger communities and significant savings.
- Developing a better understanding of and delivering more effective **support** to all sectors of the City so that we can achieve our priorities together.

Ward End & Pelham Timebank

Participants deposit their time by giving practical help and support to others, for example taking someone shopping or doing their ironing, and can withdraw time when they require assistance. A broker manages the exchanges between people and keeps a full record of activity. There is a strong emphasis on getting people into work as any unemployed member is supported by the broker, who has good links with the local job centre, to do online, accredited training and develop an employment action plan. Timebanks are useful in developing community cohesion and promoting community independence.

Community Based Budgeting

Birmingham is piloting Community Based Budgeting for families with complex needs. The City Council is working closely with families, communities and other agencies to develop a real understanding of how to achieve change and improve the lives of those families facing multiple and complex problems. Families will benefit from an integrated service model which will provide a single point of contact and an advocate who can work out with them what is needed and coordinate a range of support. This whole system approach will also enable the trial of more early intervention and prevention work such as positive parenting support that will prevent more expensive problems from developing later on.

Community Chest

Birmingham has devolved over £115m of budget to local constituencies, and provided each of the forty wards in the city with £100,000 "community chest" funding to be used on local priorities.



5. The future role of the Council

The role of the council within a Big Society will be very different; it will be less focused on the direct provision of services and more focused on working with others, including the voluntary and community sector and the business community, in an equal partnership to improve outcomes for residents and communities. The council of the future must:

Provide civic leadership: Elected councillors in their role as community leaders and with their unique knowledge of their place and residents have a crucial part to play in driving forward the Big Society and developing stronger, more empowered and more resilient communities. Councillors understand the problems faced by their residents and are ideally placed to bring residents, businesses, voluntary organisations and others together to solve problems collectively and develop very localised 'bottom-up' solutions. For example councillors can identify potential civic entrepreneurs in their area, can facilitate closer working between the Council and local communities to identify how best to deliver public services, they can support the development of local groups to act as

champions on relevant issues, and they will ensure that the views of all groups are fairly represented.

Develop an “enabling” public sector:

Redesigning services so that they create the right environment and conditions for the Big Society to flourish. This includes opening up opportunities for communities and third sector organizations and businesses to make a contribution; supporting individuals to take more control over the services they use; and providing expertise, funding and encouragement to help sustainable projects develop. It also includes developing new and more effective ways of supporting a thriving private sector for example helping to foster the horizontal networks of support that can help new enterprises to grow.

Build stronger communities: supporting and enabling the community so that they can help themselves and others through more volunteering and stronger community organizations as well as encouraging more support for the community from the private sector.

6. Taking the Big Society Forward

So how do we achieve a Big Society? We take seriously the council's important role in driving this forward and have identified the following key actions for 2011 – 12 which will be taken forward in an action plan.

- > Extend our review of Big Society activity in the city by using social media to invite residents and businesses to send in examples and develop a new Civic Pride awards scheme to begin recognising them.
- > Complete the pilots of neighbourhood budgeting and neighbourhood planning and work in partnership with government to begin extending these to other neighbourhoods in the city.
- > Develop and implement campaigns on volunteering and civic pride.
- > Explore how to use social investment sources to support new and expanding social enterprises and to encourage them to collaborate to secure public contracts.

Our actions for this year, which will be developed and expanded further in the future, focus on three critical areas:

1. **Achieving cultural change** – changing attitudes and relationships and the ways in which we work;
 - We need to ensure we have a **sound understanding of what our residents think and an effective means by which to communicate opportunities to get involved.** To do this we need to make more use of new technology including 'apps' and social online tools, the development of which are fundamentally changing the way that the community, voluntary and public sector can work together for productive purposes and will increasingly make a difference to how communities self organise and collaborate. We have already supported on-line opportunities to get involved in local decision making through the "Be Involved" website and to volunteer through the BVSC volunteer centre and website.
 - **Review our procurement processes so that they allow for greater diversity in the**

supply of public services - personalisation, trusts, mutuals, co-operatives, social enterprises, faith groups, partnerships with communities, employee owned co-operatives and co-production should have an increased role in service delivery. We can create a level playing field for all potential suppliers by breaking down contracts into smaller packages allowing smaller organisations to compete and by adopting simpler processes for smaller value contracts. We also need to consider how our procurement can benefit the local economy for example by introducing specific clauses into the contracts we award that require successful organisations to employ local people and take on apprentices.

2. Creating sustainable and stronger neighbourhoods – a new programme of neighbourhood working;

- **Support & develop neighbourhood management** across the city, based on models we have developed where this work is built into existing staff roles.
- **Introduce more widely community and neighbourhood budgets** where local people and their councillor's are given greater influence over how money is spent in their area. This will encourage better use of local knowledge to create innovative solutions to local needs. We also need to explore how we can maximise the money available in local budgets through **the use**

of social investment sources, social impact bonds and other such tools.

3. Promoting responsibility which includes volunteering and philanthropy.

- The citizens of Birmingham volunteer in large numbers in many different ways, we need to explore how we can **increase volunteering further** and ensure it is channelled in ways which meet the needs of local communities. In order to do this we must develop a better understanding of those needs, identify what opportunities for volunteering these needs present and know how residents are willing to volunteer for these opportunities. We will also fully support the requirements of the new Volunteering Plan for Birmingham agreed with local partners and the voluntary sector and continue to support the BVSC volunteering centre.
- **Create more timebanks**, like the example given in Ward End and Pelham, which allow people to make small volunteer contributions to improve their own quality of life and that of other residents in their local area. Since these contributions are so flexible they are helpful in alleviating people's fear of making too much of a commitment and so encourage them to continue with it. We need to provide support to more communities to introduce timebanks which will help them to develop greater social capital and promote community cohesion.

- We recognise the role that businesses can play in growing a Big Society, many businesses for example have adopted corporate social responsibility policies with the aim of making a positive contribution to society. There are many other opportunities for businesses to contribute, some of those already identified are: developing the skills and motivation of employees through volunteering; developing long term supportive relationships eg with individual schools or looked after children; recruiting, investing and procuring locally; improving local business relationships. We need to work with businesses and organisations like Business in the Community to ensure that we make effective use of what businesses can offer in meeting the challenges the Big Society presents.
- Finally to support growth of local economies we want to **facilitate new networks between small businesses**. Small businesses, including voluntary and community organisations, can often feel isolated and unsupported, the Council is uniquely positioned to support organisations coming together locally to develop partnerships and need-led collaboration.

Small Area Budgets

Handsworth and Lozells are leading on Small Area Budgets which aim to give residents a greater say on how services are delivered locally resulting in services which better reflect local priorities. One of the initiatives introduced as a result has been an integrated service hub to bring together GPs, health workers, housing officers, neighbourhood police and community safety officers and school heads.

Scawdi

Scawdi is a Highgate-based community project which is working with unemployed graduates to launch the Graduate & Youth Opportunities for Business scheme. The scheme aims to help young people establish a small business by providing them with access to business mentors, linking them to empty properties on a rent-free basis for between 6 and 12 months and giving them a starter pack of office essentials eg a recycled computer, printer, internet access and a box of stationery. The project leader's work with unemployed young people and seeing the increasing number of empty properties prompted the initial idea for the scheme.



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