

Building the Big Society

Our Conservative - Liberal Democrat Government has come together with a driving ambition: to put more power and opportunity into people's hands.

We want to give citizens, communities and local government the power and information they need to come together, solve the problems they face and build the Britain they want. We want society – the families, networks, neighbourhoods and communities that form the fabric of so much of our everyday lives – to be bigger and stronger than ever before. Only when people and communities are given more power and take more responsibility can we achieve fairness and opportunity for all.

Building this Big Society isn't just the responsibility of just one or two departments. It is the responsibility of every department of Government, and the responsibility of every citizen too. Government on its own cannot fix every problem. We are all in this together. We need to draw on the skills and expertise of people across the country as we respond to the social, political and economic challenges Britain faces.

This document outlines the already agreed policies that we believe will help make that possible. It is the first strand of a comprehensive Programme for Government to be published in the coming days, which will deliver the reform, renewal, fairness and change Britain needs.

1. Give communities more powers

- We will radically reform the planning system to give neighbourhoods far more ability to determine the shape of the places in which their inhabitants live.
- We will introduce new powers to help communities save local facilities and services threatened with closure, and give communities the right to bid to take over local state-run services.

- We will train a new generation of community organisers and support the creation of neighbourhood groups across the UK, especially in the most deprived areas.

2. Encourage people to take an active role in their communities

- We will take a range of measures to encourage volunteering and involvement in social action, including launching a national 'Big Society Day' and making regular community involvement a key element of civil service staff appraisals.
- We will take a range of measures to encourage charitable giving and philanthropy.
- We will introduce a National Citizen Service. The initial flagship project will provide a programme for 16 year olds to give them a chance to develop the skills needed to be active and responsible citizens, mix with people from different backgrounds, and start getting involved in their communities.

3. Transfer power from central to local government

- We will promote the radical devolution of power and greater financial autonomy to local government, including a full review of local government finance.
- We will give councils a general power of competence.
- We will abolish Regional Spatial Strategies and return decision-making powers on housing and planning to local councils.

4. Support co-ops, mutuals, charities and social enterprises

- We will support the creation and expansion of mutuals, co-operatives, charities and social enterprises, and support these groups to have much greater involvement in the running of public services.
- We will give public sector workers a new right to form employee-owned co-operatives and bid to take over the services they deliver. This will empower millions of public sector workers to become their own boss and help them to deliver better services.

- We will use funds from dormant bank accounts to establish a Big Society Bank, which will provide new finance for neighbourhood groups, charities, social enterprises and other nongovernmental bodies.

5. Publish government data

- We will create a new 'right to data' so that government-held datasets can be requested and used by the public, and then published on a regular basis.
- We will oblige the police to publish detailed local crime data statistics every month, so the public can get proper information about crime in their neighbourhoods and hold the police to account for their performance.