



Open for All?

THE CHANGING NATURE OF EQUALITY UNDER BIG SOCIETY AND LOCALISM

November 2011

Final report prepared by
**Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) and
Centre for Local Policy Studies (CLPS)**

Presented to
North West Infrastructure Partnership (NWIP)



About the organisations

About NWIP and VSNW

The North West Infrastructure Partnership (NWIP) is a partnership of 28 regional and sub-regional voluntary and community sector infrastructure organisations who come together to provide a coherent voice for the voluntary and community sector at regional level. It is facilitated by Voluntary Sector North West (VSNW). Voluntary Sector North West is the regional voluntary sector network for the North West. The purpose of VSNW is to ensure that the voluntary and community sector (VCS), in all its diversity, takes its full part in shaping the future of the North West. VSNW members provide community services, regenerate neighbourhoods, support individuals, promote volunteering and tackle discrimination.

About CLES

Established in 1986, the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) is an independent think-doing organisation and network of subscribing organisations involved in regeneration activities, local economic development and local governance. CLES is involved in a number of activities, including: policy research; information and briefing service; events and training; consultancy trading arm; and policy advice function. CLES is a national organisation, with our work supporting regeneration and local economic development in localities across the United Kingdom. CLES has recently acquired New Start magazine and launched a new online service; increasing our capacity to disseminate research findings and policy messages to a wide audience of policy-makers and practitioners across the economic/community development and regeneration sector.

About CLPS

The Centre for Local Policy Studies (CLPS) has been established, since 1993, at Edge Hill University to provide a focus for work on local governance and community development. Within this framework we are concerned with all aspects of policy, organisation and management at the local and sub-national level as they occur in Britain, Europe and internationally. In addition to local policy and theory, the Centre has a concern with those aspects of national policy-making which impact on local and regional structures. Specialist areas of work include: equality, third sector, engagement and partnerships.

About the authors

This report has been written by Matthew Jackson, Head of Research at CLES and Stuart Speeden, Head of Centre at CLPS.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the following researchers for their contributions to this research: Jessica Smith, Mohammed Dhalech, Jules Mckenzie, and Julian Clarke.

The authors would also like to thank the steering group members from Voluntary Sector North West, North West Disability Infrastructure Partnership, Merseyside Disability Federation, the Lesbian and Gay Foundation, One North West, and the Directory of Social Change for their contributions to the research process and comments upon previous drafts.

The authors would also like to thank the organisations which supported us in setting up the focus groups and the equalities groups and representatives which attended.

Further information

For further information about this report please contact Warren Escadale, Policy and Research Manager at VSNW, policy@vsnw.org.uk.

CONTENTS	PAGE NO.
1 INTRODUCTION	11
1.1 Research context	11
1.2 Research purpose and partnership	11
1.3 Research aims	12
1.4 Introducing equalities impact assessment	13
1.5 Research methodology	13
1.5.1 Stage 1 – Desk based review	13
1.5.2 Stage 2 – Primary research	13
1.6 Report structure	14
2 POLICY CONTEXT	15
2.1 From 'equality' to 'fairness'	15
2.2 The notion of localism	16
2.2.1 The policy	16
2.2.2 The theoretical impact of localism upon equalities	16
2.2.3 The equality impact assessment of localism by government	16
2.3 The notion of big society	17
2.3.1 The policy	17
2.3.2 The theoretical impact of big society upon equalities	17
2.3.3 The equality impact assessment of big society by government	18
2.4 The reform of welfare	18
2.4.1 The policy	18
2.4.2 The theoretical impact of welfare reform upon equalities	18
2.4.3 The equality impact assessment of welfare reform by government	19
2.5 The reform of health	20
2.5.1 The policy	20
2.5.2 The theoretical impact of health reform upon equalities	20
2.5.3 The equality impact assessment of health reform by government	21
2.6 The reform of economic growth	21
2.6.1 The policy	21
2.6.2 The theoretical impact of economic growth upon equalities	21
2.6.3 The equality impact assessment of economic growth reform by government	22
2.7 The shift towards open public service	22
3 IMPACT OF LOCALISM	23
3.1 Introducing localism	23
3.1.1 Theme 1: Reduce bureaucracy	23
3.1.2 Theme 2: Enable communities and local government to take action	23
3.1.3 Theme 3: Increase local control of public finance	23
3.1.4 Theme 4: Open up public services to a broader range of suppliers	24
3.1.5 Theme 5: Open up government finances to public scrutiny	24
3.1.6 Theme 6: Strengthen accountability to local people	24
3.2 Common impacts	24
3.2.1 Impact 1 – A changing geography of institutions and access to services	24
3.2.2 Impact 2 – A question over the importance placed in the public sector on monitoring	25
3.2.3 Impact 3 – Increased incidences of harassment and hate crime	26
3.2.4 Impact 4 – A dilution of the regional tier and associated equalities commitment	26
3.2.5 Impact 5 – The capacity to deliver and the challenges of procurement	27
3.2.6 Impact 6 – It will favour those with the greatest voice	28
3.2.7 Impact 7 – A reduction in referral mechanisms	29
3.3 Exploring the socio-economic implications of emerging localism policy and equalities impact	29
3.4 The value of equalities focused groups to localism	32

4	IMPACT OF BIG SOCIETY	33
4.1	Introducing the big society	33
4.1.1	Public service reform	33
4.1.2	Empowering communities	33
4.1.3	Social action	34
4.2	Common impacts	36
4.2.1	Impact 1 – A lack of understanding of what it means	36
4.2.2	Impact 2 – Reduced funding and capacity for voluntary and community sector	37
4.2.3	Impact 3 – Adverse impact on deprived communities	39
4.2.4	Impact 4 – Weakened infrastructure and support for volunteering	40
4.2.5	Impact 5 – Dependency on volunteering may weaken quality of service	41
4.2.6	Impact 6 – Equalities role weakened through focus on neighbourhoods	42
4.3	Exploring the socio-economic implications of emerging big society policy and equalities impact	42
4.4	The value of equalities focused groups to big society	45
5	IMPACT OF WELFARE REFORM	46
5.1	Introducing welfare reform	46
5.2	Common impacts	47
5.2.1	Impact 1 – A supply and demand mismatch	47
5.2.2	Impact 2 – Access to specialist employment support services cut	51
5.2.3	Impact 3 – Reduced benefit entitlement for the poorest	52
5.2.4	Impact 4 – Increase in unfair pressure to work	55
5.2.5	Impact 5 – A need for vocational qualifications	55
5.2.6	Impact 6 – An increase in harassment and prejudice in-work	56
5.2.7	Impact 7 – The cost of reassessment to the State	56
5.3	Exploring the socio-economic implications of emerging welfare policy and equalities impact	57
5.4	The value of equalities focused groups to welfare reform	60
6	IMPACT OF HEALTH	61
6.1	Introducing health and social care reform	61
6.1.1	Theme 1: Devolving power	61
6.1.2	Theme 2: Abolishing existing planning structures	61
6.1.3	Theme 3: GP consortia at centre of commissioning (these are now known as Clinical Commissioning Groups)	61
6.1.4	Theme 4: Local authorities to be responsible for public health	62
6.1.5	Theme 5: Governance – Health and Wellbeing Boards	62
6.1.6	Theme 6: Accountability – Health Watch	62
6.2	Common impacts	62
6.2.1	Impact 1 – Lack of sensitivity to equalities in service planning	62
6.2.2	Impact 2: GP’s lack of understanding and commitment to equalities	63
6.2.3	Impact 3 – Weakened equalities representation and engagement with new bodies and a lack of accountability	64
6.2.4	Impact 4 – Reduced quality and level of service across protected characteristics	65
6.3	Exploring the socio-economic implications of emerging health policy and equalities impact	67
6.4	The value of equalities focused groups to health reform	70
7	IMPACT OF ECONOMIC GROWTH	71
7.1	Introduction to economic growth	71
7.2	Common impacts	72
7.2.1	Impact 1 – Lack of voluntary and community sector and equalities representation on emerging structures	72
7.2.2	Impact 2 – Reduced resilience as opposed to increased	72
7.2.3	Impact 3 – A loss of specialist services	73

7.2.4	Impact 4 – An increase in inequality	73
7.2.5	Impact 5 – A loss of voice for equalities	74
7.3	Exploring the socio-economic implications of emerging economic growth policy and equalities impact	74
7.4	The value of equalities focused groups to economic growth reform	77
8	AREA CASE STUDIES FROM THE NORTH WEST	78
8.1	Case Study 1 – Liverpool	78
8.1.1	Socio-economic profile	78
8.1.2	The equalities focused voluntary and community sector in Liverpool	78
8.1.3	The equalities and socio-economic impact of emerging policy in Liverpool	79
8.2	Case Study 2 – Cumbria	80
8.2.1	Socio-economic profile	80
8.2.2	The equalities focused voluntary and community sector in Cumbria	80
8.2.3	The equalities and socio-economic impact of emerging policy in Cumbria	81
8.3	Case Study 3 – Blackburn with Darwen	82
8.3.1	Socio-economic profile	82
8.3.2	The equalities focused voluntary and community sector in Blackburn with Darwen	82
8.3.3	The equalities and socio-economic impact of emerging policy in Blackburn with Darwen	82
9	CONCLUSION AND WAYS FORWARD	84
9.1	A recap on the report approach and content	84
9.2	Summarising the equalities impacts	85
9.3	Discussing the equalities impact	86
9.3.1	New forms of representation are weak and excluding groups	86
9.3.2	Cuts are damaging voluntary sector capability to deliver big society	86
9.3.3	Welfare reform is having a negative impact on equalities groups	87
9.3.4	The implementation of government policy is disproportionately harming the most excluded	87
9.3.5	A real threat to the equalities voluntary and community sector	87
9.4	The shift towards open public services	88
9.5	The need for a new framework to support social justice within localism	88
9.5.1	Ways forward	89

FIGURES

Figure 1: Proportion of voluntary and community sector organisations delivering public services by income size	28
Figure 2: Rising volunteer numbers	40
Figure 3: Proportion of population claiming key out of work benefit	47
Figure 4: Levels of worklessness by North West authority	48
Figure 5: Change in JSA claims in the North West (July 2008 – July 2011)	48
Figure 6: Number of Jobcentre unfilled vacancies	49
Figure 7: Claims of Incapacity Benefit by North West local authority by duration of claim	50
Figure 8: JSA increases in ethnic minority communities	50
Figure 9: Increasing number of Disability Living Allowance claimants (2008-2011)	54

TABLES

Table 1: Equality impact of emerging policy	10
Table 2: Common equalities impacts and socio-economic implications of localism	30
Table 3: Applicability of localism equalities impact by protected characteristic	31
Table 4: Change in organisational offer as a result of cuts and big society	38
Table 5: Common equalities impacts and socio-economic implications of big society	43
Table 6: Applicability of big society equalities impact by protected characteristic	44

Table 7: Common equalities impacts and socio-economic implications of welfare	58
Table 8: Applicability of welfare equalities impact by protected characteristic	59
Table 9: Common equalities impacts and socio-economic implications of health	68
Table 10: Applicability of health equalities impact by protected characteristic	69
Table 11: Common equalities impacts and socio-economic implications of economic growth	75
Table 12: Applicability of economic growth equalities impact by protected characteristic	76
Table 13: Equality impact of emerging policy	85

APPENDICES

1	The protected characteristics	i
2	Historical equalities policy context	iii
3	Focus group attendees	xiii
4	Questionnaire proforma	xvi
5	Equality Impact Assessment considerations	xxv
6	Membership of North West Infrastructure Partnership	xxix

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This executive summary presents the core findings of research undertaken between February and October 2011 by the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) and the Centre for Local Policy Studies (CLPS) at Edge Hill University. Commissioned by Voluntary Sector North West and the North West Infrastructure Partnership (NWIP) the research has sought to undertake a focused review of the equalities impact and socio-economic implications of emerging government notions around localism and big society and policy reforms around welfare, health, and economic growth.

This work has an emphasis upon voluntary and community sector organisations representing groups with protected characteristics¹ and a range of research methods have been deployed. The research has been undertaken over an eight month period with six research staff involved. We have:

- ❑ undertaken an extensive policy review and produced an associated think-piece;
- ❑ undertaken twelve focus groups with individuals and organisations representing groups with each of the protected characteristics engaging over 200 representatives of the voluntary and community sector across the North West;
- ❑ issued a questionnaire to equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations across the North West with a return from 86 organisations;
- ❑ developed three area based case studies in Liverpool, Cumbria, and Blackburn with Darwen.

Context

Over the last ten years we have seen the rise in the importance of equalities across public policy and service delivery decision making. A legally embedded equality and human rights framework has been effectively developed which has been concerned with delivering equality of opportunity, fair and equal services, and anti-discrimination. Alongside this legislative framework there has been:

- ❑ a growth in specialist support and advice services across a range of themes;
- ❑ an increase in equalities focused networks and partnerships;
- ❑ an increased opportunity to lobby and advocate upon equalities issues;
- ❑ and an increase in infrastructure representing equalities issues and equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations.

Despite this policy framework and limited investment there remains significant social and economic inequality in many communities and amongst groups with protected characteristics. The Coalition Government has signalled its intent to carry on the broad approach highlighted above in their Equality Strategy but without the same emphasis upon the associated legislative framework and with an emphasis upon 'fairness' as opposed to 'equality'.

The period since the election of May 2010 has been characterised by a frenzied period of policy making and emerging legislation. The core thrust of policy development has been characterised by a drive to reduce central government prescription and bureaucracy and to hand greater power to communities to develop and deliver their own services. This has however come without an adequate consideration as our research finds of the impact of these emerging policies upon equalities groups.

¹ The protected characteristics referred to throughout this report are age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. We have not discussed marriage and civil partnership, and pregnancy and maternity

Key research findings: impacts on equalities groups in the North West

Having looked at the notions of localism and big society and the reforms around welfare, health, and economic growth the following highlights the key common impacts on equalities issues and equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations. A full summary of equalities impact is detailed in Appendix A of this executive summary.

1. The emergence of the policy reforms identified above has come at a cost

The policy developments have been developed without sufficient consideration of equalities issues and equalities impact. The Equality Impact Assessments undertaken by central government are patchy, often without sufficient regard to the legislative elements of the Equalities Act 2010. Indeed the whole notion of equalities appears to have taken a step backwards in emerging central policy and as a core value. The language has indeed moved from equality towards fairness suggesting a weakened commitment to equality and those groups with protected characteristics.

2. New forms of representation are weak and excluding groups

Localism places emphasis on community and there was **real concern that this emphasis on geographic community would lead to a weakening of involvement for protected characteristic interests** such as for BME, disabled, and lesbian, gay and bisexual groups. Involvement and engagement are important in governance to secure scrutiny and accountability, but also there are benefits of involvement in the processes for implementation. **Greater consideration needs to be given as to how people with protected characteristics can be involved in the implementation of programmes and the design of services so that they are more effective and responsive to needs.**

3. Cuts are damaging voluntary sector capability to deliver big society

The government have placed great importance on the big society and its contribution to changing the relationship between the state, the individual and society.

However, we cannot view this laudable aim, without viewing it is taking place in an era of cuts. Our evidence suggests that the austerity measures that have been introduced and the way that these are feeding out through local government and the NHS are not leading to the development of a big society, instead we are seeing a closure and reduction in capacity within the voluntary and community sector. **This work has found that these changes are having a negative impact on equalities in many localities.**

Some smaller and equalities focused organisations had already closed. **There is therefore a great danger that existing capacity to support the big society and the growth of volunteering will be lost. Larger voluntary and community sector organisations may benefit but the sector may be transformed in a way that fails to meet the big society vision.**

4. Welfare reform is having a negative impact on equalities groups

This research work has found that **benefits and services are being reduced in key areas that negatively affect some equalities groups and individuals.** Disabled people and women identified themselves as being in the front line for benefit reform and reductions in services. BME and lesbian, gay and bisexual, and trans groups were concerned about specialist services that supported their effective citizenship through advice, information, training and access to the labour market would be lost or reduced. **Overall, particular classes of people defined by protected characteristics, were experiencing an unfairness because the new policy framework is liable to reinstate patterns of exclusion and discrimination. This erodes the work of successive equalities legislation that has been attempting to overcome these problems over the past decade.**

5. The implementation of Government policy is disproportionately harming the most excluded

Throughout the focus groups, there was recognition that social and economic deprivation was aggravating barriers to engagement. The socio-economic duty was dropped from the Equality Act 2010, but economic and social deprivation remains a barrier to equalities and its effects intersect with the other barriers to equality experienced by all groups with protected characteristics. Rather than tackling poverty, deprivation and inequality, we would argue **that there is a hardening and a deepening of inequality**

amongst equalities groups and people with protected characteristics; unless there is a place specific commitment from local government to engage and support voluntary and community sector organisations.

6. A real threat to the equalities voluntary and community sector

There are a wide range of organisations that contribute to equalities, some providing specialist services for a particular group within a local area, some providing a regional service supporting local needs and some providing a general commitment to equalities across a wider service. Because of the nature of these services and the communities that they serve many of these organisations have operated through grants or exist as mutuals or through volunteering.

These specialist services have been particularly vulnerable to cuts in small grants and they are more likely to need the support of infrastructure bodies to support their continued survival. The evidence from this work shows that these organisations are coming under increased pressure as demand for their services increase. This pressure on organisations was particularly expressed through disability organisations, BME and lesbian, gay and bisexual, and trans organisations but also the organisations such as Citizens Advice that provide services across the protected characteristics. Beyond this, **there is a very real and growing deficit in the capacity of organisations to properly participate in the new governance structures and hold bodies to account. If equalities are to be effectively supported within these structures then funding mechanisms to support this sector will need to be addressed.**

The shift towards open public services

The equalities impacts described above have been applied to the policy notions of big society and localism and the associated reforms around welfare, health, and economic growth. Since the fieldwork was undertaken the Open Public Service White Paper has proposed five principles that cut across the service delivery agenda. The five principles are choice, decentralisation, diversity, fairness, and accountability. These principles begin the conversation about developing a framework for coherent reform.

Based upon the key findings outlined above we would argue that government need to consider the following core questions to explore how equality could play a radical role in social change:

- ❑ **Choice** – ‘where possible we will increase choice’:
 - How can we have choice over services when specialist equalities focused services are being removed and people have to travel further distances to access services? How can we truly have choice driven change without an understanding of the diversity of need?
 - Who monitors and provides the evidence of service need for groups with protected characteristics?
- ❑ **Decentralisation** – ‘power should be decentralised to the lowest appropriate level’
 - How can decentralisation be achieved without intermediaries and voluntary and community sector infrastructure to provide support and advice?
 - What happens to the array of equalities knowledge and legislative process which has been developed over the last ten years? Will this feed into new provision?
- ❑ **Diversity** – ‘public services should be open to a range of providers’
 - What happens to the equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations that do not have the capacity, skills, knowledge or experience to bid for and deliver public services?
- ❑ **Fairness** – ‘we will ensure fair access to public services’
 - What happens in those localities and communities where the cuts in public expenditure are having a disproportionate impact on economic and social inequality?
 - How is the voice of the most marginalised heard in service decision making and delivery?
- ❑ **Accountability** – ‘public services should be accountable to users and taxpayers’
 - Who provides a voice, network and lobbying role for equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations and groups with protected characteristics?

The need for a new framework to support social justice within localism

Throughout the impacts and questions described above three key themes have been emerging.

The first is concerned with measurement of impact and the lack of consideration of equalities in emerging central government policy agendas. There is **a clear need for robust systems to be in place that can measure and monitor equalities impact** as this is a very broad agenda for social change as policy rolls out. The second is **about representation, accountability and involvement**. The third is that **policy change is having a significant and unequal impact on service provision and inclusion and this must be redressed**.

These three themes raise **the question of how equalities will be assured within a new system of governance and within a society increasingly driven by markets, whether that is the conventional private sector market, or as we suggest a social market which is open to all and offers real opportunity and genuine change**. The transformative potential of equalities focused voluntary and community sector groups has not yet been understood.

The current government has rejected centralised target driven approaches for measurement and governance and what is required now is a new approach based on evidence and based on accountability at the local level. **For this to be achieved, a new framework for social justice is required to ensure that equalities and groups with protected characteristics are a central part of localism and the big society**. This focus upon the need for a new framework to support social justice within emerging policy frames our key ways forward from this research. As such the ways forward are related to the government and are entwined in the principles of the Open Public Services White Paper.

Ways forward

- ❑ The Government must recognise that a Social Justice Framework needs to be developed that ensures public services are **accountable** to all users and taxpayers.
- ❑ The Government must develop a more joined up approach to understanding and addressing the impact on equalities groups across all policy areas and Government Departments to ensure **fairness** in provision.
- ❑ The Government must undertake an urgent review of the role of equalities groups in the public service agenda to enable true **decentralisation**.
- ❑ The Government must consider how they can involve equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations in the process of **diversifying** service provision.
- ❑ The Government must adopt a more consultative approach to service provision which builds in the consideration of people with protected characteristics to ensure everyone has access to the best **choice** of services for them.

Appendix A: Equalities impact and socio-economic implication of emerging policy

Beyond the common concerns and issues identified above, this research has utilised a host of primary methods to identify the detailed impact of the emerging policy notions and reforms upon equalities issues, equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations, and upon wider social and economic considerations. Table 1 provides an overview of the common findings of the equality impact assessment undertaken by CLPS and CLES for each of the notions of localism and big society; and the reforms of welfare, health and economic growth.

Table 1: Equality impact of emerging policy

Equality Impact	Localism	Big Society	Welfare	Health	Economic Growth
More difficult to access services and more distance to travel	✓		✓	✓	
Cuts in funding and reduction of specialist services	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Loss of networks and partnerships for equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations	✓	✓			✓
Fewer reporting mechanisms and support for hate crime	✓				
Reduced understanding of community need	✓		✓		
Loss of equalities voice in public services	✓	✓		✓	✓
Difficult to engage in service delivery due to equalities organisation size and capacity	✓				
Marginalisation of communities with protected characteristics	✓				
Reduced ability to lobby and advocate	✓	✓			
Lack of understanding of what policy means	✓		✓		
Growth in demand to provide volunteer placements but a lack of funding to provide training		✓		✓	
Loss of equalities knowledge and specialism		✓	✓	✓	✓
Increased unfair pressure to work			✓		
Increased harassment and prejudice			✓		
Reduced income for groups with protected characteristics			✓		
Humiliation for groups with protected characteristics			✓		
Loss of equalities monitoring mechanisms				✓	
Lack of understanding of equalities issues				✓	
Lack of equalities representation on Boards				✓	✓
Lack of access to opportunities					✓

1 INTRODUCTION

This final report presents the findings of research undertaken by the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) and the Centre for Local Policy Studies (CLPS) at Edge Hill University between February and November 2011. Commissioned by Voluntary Sector North West (VSNW) and the North West Infrastructure Partnership (NWIP) the research has sought to explore emerging areas of Coalition Government policy, particularly the notions of localism and big society, and assess the impact of these policies upon equalities issues, equalities focused voluntary and community sector groups, and more general social and economic considerations.

This report presents the core findings of the research undertaken including: a policy review; equalities and socio-economic impact assessment; substantial engagement with equalities focused voluntary and community sector groups from across the North West, a series of North West specific case studies, and key conclusions and recommendations. A supplementary paper will outline thoughts upon developing a modern social justice framework, derived through this research.

1.1 Research context

For a decade, we have seen the development of an equality and human rights framework across the United Kingdom that has been concerned with delivering equality of opportunity, fair and equal services, and anti-discrimination. Although the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition, as elected in May 2010, has given its support to this agenda through its Equality Strategy² there are growing concerns that the policy framework currently being pursued by the Government represents, at best, a weakened commitment and, at worst, a retreat from equality as a central aim of government policy.

Since coming to power in May 2010, the Government has introduced a range of policies that have been designed with the aim of reforming the relationship between the centre and the local, and to change the way public services are delivered. The notions of localism and big society, and associated reforms around welfare, health and economic growth, represent a transformation of the public policy arena with reform taking place at an unprecedented pace and scale.

Alongside the notions and reforms identified above has been a major austerity programme which has sought to reduce national debt and make stringent cuts to public expenditure. This has already brought about major change in public spending, with consequences for jobs and services in the public and voluntary and community sectors.

Whilst there has been much debate about the Coalition's approach, relatively little has been said about what current policies mean for equalities. In the maelstrom of restructuring across the public and voluntary and community sector, there is a real and growing concern that equalities issues are slipping off the agenda. It is clear that there is a questioning of the equalities agenda within government and this has been characterised by the Government's own use of language, talking increasingly of fairness rather than equality, and with this there has been a decline in the importance placed on the equality impact of policies and their consequences. Equally, there has been no real thorough assessment of what the emerging policy agendas mean for equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations, or broader economic and social considerations.

The Coalition Government has concerns that bureaucratic process hinders economic growth and entrepreneurialism thereby making the UK less competitive. There is a sense that the equality and human rights framework represents, to the Government, a disproportionate cost and that there might be new ways of thinking about social justice.

1.2 Research purpose and partnership

Against this background, VSNW and NWIP³ commissioned a research study into the impact of emerging policy notions and reforms upon equalities issues, equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations, and wider social and economic considerations; providing general conclusions alongside a specific focus on the North West region of England.

² HM Government (December 2010) *The Equality Strategy – Building a Fairer Britain*

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/equalities/equality-strategy-publications/equality-strategy/equality-strategy?view=Binary>

³ Information about NWIP and its membership is given in Appendix 6

The research process has been developed by a steering group including representatives of Voluntary Sector North West, NW Disability Infrastructure Partnership, Merseyside Disability Federation, the Lesbian and Gay Foundation, One North West, and the Directory of Social Change, and delivered collaboratively by CLPS and CLES.

CLPS and CLES came together to work in partnership on this research because of: our complimentary knowledge around policy, equalities and economic development. CLPS has a strong track record of undertaking equalities impact assessments and contributing to the local government equalities framework with CLES, the primary organisation in the UK focused upon economic and social value of policy intervention. Over the course of the research, six staff, each with different specialisms and areas of expertise, have been deployed in developing the content of this report.

The initial purpose of the research was to look at the notions of localism and big society and assess the equalities and socio-economic impacts of emerging policy around these notions. It soon became clear, through an initial set of scoping focus groups, that under these notions sat key reforms which were greatly influencing equalities issues and equalities focused voluntary and community sector groups in the North West. These reforms included the policy areas of welfare, health and economic growth. These reforms were therefore added to the focus of the research.

Throughout the policy notions and reforms described above has been a rhetoric of devolution of power to communities and the voluntary and community sector. However, the intended effects of these policies have been confounded by their coincidence with the scale of public sector cuts which have thrown the voluntary and community sector into turmoil. In terms of formal staffing, the latest Labour Force Survey⁴ data shows a fall of over 4.7% in the 12 months to the end of the second quarter of 2011. This is the national figure. Regional breakdowns are not yet available however given the notable loss of Area Based Grants, which will have greatly affected the old Neighbourhood Renewal Fund areas of which 21 of the original 88 are in the North West, it is very possible that the fall in North West voluntary and community sector employment is greater than 4.7%.

Added to this already potentially disproportionate impact of government policy in the North West, there is a real risk that equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations, which are often smaller and more reliant than 'mainstream' organisations on volunteers, grant funding and specialised funding programmes, will increasingly lack the capacity to engage with and/or deliver public services and as a result get left behind. Moreover, those organisations that are in a position to engage in commissioning and/or contracting may find that their ability to contest government on issues affecting communities of interest around equalities is constrained at a time when the need to support, advise, represent and lobby for targeted communities is increasingly important. These considerations immediately raise the possibility of whole tranches of specialist community-based groups either reducing their volunteer engagement activity or losing interest and dropping out of locally joined-up activity.

1.3 Research aims

The research partnership therefore set out to explore the issues identified above in more detail, particularly assessing the impact of emerging notions and policy reforms upon equalities issues, equalities focused voluntary and community sector groups, and wider social and economic considerations. As such, the research had the following principal aims:

- to gauge the impact of current policy on equalities infrastructure and voluntary and community sector groups in the North West;
- to assess the impact of current policy on equalities issues;
- to use case studies to demonstrate the social and economic value of equalities organisations in the North West;
- to develop a set of equalities indicators.

⁴ <http://www.vsnw.org.uk/news/view/2011-09-27-voluntary-sector-employment-down-5-in-last-12-months>

1.4 Introducing equalities impact assessment

Throughout the study, the question of Central Government's role in carrying out impact assessments has come to the fore and, alongside the aims described above, we have found ourselves not just asking about the impact of the policies in terms of equalities issues and groups, but also why it is that the Government's impact assessment studies do not seem to reflect the concerns of communities of interest on the ground. The report therefore looks at the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) process and sets out what seem to be weaknesses in practice that undermine the Government's performance in relation to its legal duties to promote equality.

The study is based on research that has tried to capture the scale of the changes that are taking place, but also an understanding of the effects that change is having on people with protected characteristics defined in the Equality Act 2010⁵. These protected characteristics are detailed in Appendix 1. The study contained here has been undertaken with limited resources and is not intended to provide evidence of conclusive outcomes. Rather, it is an investigation that highlights areas of concern, concerns based on qualitative research which explores the impact of emerging policies on organisations and individuals given protection under the Equality Act: sex; race; disability; age; sexual orientation; religion and belief; and gender reassignment. In practice, we feel it shows the way towards an understanding of what a new social justice framework needs to consider.

1.5 Research methodology

The scope of the study is very wide: we wanted to develop an understanding of the impact of the each of the policy notions and reforms in relation to each of the protected characteristics and on the voluntary and community sector in the North West; we wanted to recognise different experiences in relation to place, geography and social and economic considerations; and we wanted to make the social and economic case for the importance of equalities in future policy and practice. To achieve this, we have adopted the following methodological stages.

1.5.1 Stage 1 – Desk based review

Between February and March 2011, CLPS and CLES undertook a desk based review of policy and literature. The purpose of the review was fourfold:

- 1) it sought to describe the emerging notions of localism and big society, and associated reforms around economic growth, welfare and health;
- 2) it sought to identify some of the key theoretical impacts these emerging notions and reforms presented for equalities issues and groups;
- 3) it sought to identify whether government had undertaken any EqIA of these notions and reforms;
- 4) it sought to shape and provide lines of inquiry for further exploration in the primary research in the North West.

On the back of the desk based review, CLPS and CLES published a think-piece which is detailed in Section 2 of this report. This is available on the CLES⁶ and VSNW⁷ websites. The initial policy review also sought to conceptualise the research within a wider exploration of what the voluntary and community sector is for, and how equalities considerations have evolved historically. This wider consideration is detailed in Appendix 2.

1.5.2 Stage 2 – Primary research

Between April and August 2011, CLPS and CLES undertook a series of primary research activities in the North West. The purpose of the primary research was to identify the common impacts of the emerging policy notions and reforms upon equalities issues, equalities focused voluntary and community sector groups, and wider social and economic considerations. The primary research activities were as follows:

⁵ HM Government (2010) *Equality Act 2010*. <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

⁶ <http://www.cles.org.uk/publications/research-on-the-impact-of-emerging-policy-on-equalities-issues>

⁷ <http://www.vsnw.org.uk/publications/reports>

Focus groups

CLPS and CLES undertook twelve focus groups with protected characteristic specific voluntary and community sector organisations and representatives. The groups were designed to glean information about the impact of policy notions and reforms upon specific communities of interest. A list of the focus groups undertaken and the number of participants is detailed in Appendix 3.

Questionnaire

Working with the steering group members, CLPS and CLES issued an online questionnaire to equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations. The questionnaire was designed to supplement the focus groups and derive qualitative and quantitative information as to the scale of the impact of the policy notions and reforms. A total of 86 organisations responded to the questionnaire. A copy of the questionnaire proforma is detailed in Appendix 4.

Case studies

CLPS and CLES selected three case study areas in which to undertake follow up research activities. The focus here was upon identifying the place specific impacts of the notions and reforms upon equalities issues, equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations, and wider social and economic considerations. Three geographic specific focus groups (Blackburn with Darwen, Cumbria and Liverpool) took place. A list of the focus groups undertaken for the case studies and the number of participants is detailed in Appendix 3.

The findings of the focus groups and questionnaire are presented in Sections 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 of this report in relation to each of the policy notions of localism and big society, and the reforms associated with welfare, health and economic growth. The case study findings are presented in Section 8.

1.6 Report structure

This report comprises of the following sections:

Section 1	Introduction
Section 2	Policy review
Section 3	Impact of localism
Section 4	Impact of big society
Section 5	Impact of welfare
Section 6	Impact of health
Section 7	Impact of economic growth
Section 8	Area case studies
Section 9	Conclusions and ways forward

A series of further pieces of information are presented in the appendices:

- Appendix 1 – the protected characteristics;
- Appendix 2 – historical equalities policy context;
- Appendix 3 – focus group attendees;
- Appendix 4 – questionnaire proforma;
- Appendix 5 – equality impact assessment considerations;
- Appendix 6 – membership of the North West Infrastructure Partnership.

2 POLICY CONTEXT

This section of the report describes in more detail the policy notions around localism and big society, and the associated reforms around welfare, health and economic growth. It twins this description with theoretical thoughts and questions for further exploration around the impacts of these notions and reforms for equalities issues, equalities focused voluntary and community sector groups, and wider economic and social considerations. It also provides commentary upon the Government's approach to EqIA for each of these notions and reforms. Information about the purpose of EqIA is detailed in Appendix 5.

Prior to undertaking this policy description and analysis, we explore the general shift in governmental rhetoric away from consideration of 'equality' to more of a focus on 'fairness'.

2.1 From 'equality' to 'fairness'

There are a number of developments in recent months that suggest a weakening of government commitment to equality as a core value. The first sign of a different perspective on equality was a change in language. From the general election onwards, we have seen a shift in the political rhetoric where fairness has increasingly replaced equality. Beyond the rhetoric, there are real changes in equality policy and the management of equality in government.

'*The equality strategy – building a fairer Britain*' was published in December 2010, setting out the Coalition Government's current strategic approach, commitments and structural arrangements in relation to equality. It states the Government's intention of placing equality at the heart of its work and ensuring that equality is central to the Government's decision making processes, actions and priorities as it tackles the financial deficit⁸. However, our analysis of current changes introduced under the Coalition gives rise to concerns about:

- ❑ the adequacy of current structural arrangements for the promotion of equalities and race equality;
- ❑ leadership from government and its strategy in relation to race equality, particularly concerns about the apparent re-emergence of a one size fits all philosophy and a race neutral or blind approach;
- ❑ the future and role of the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC);
- ❑ failures by the Government and public bodies to comply with the existing public sector equality duties including the race equality duty;
- ❑ the disproportionate impact of the proposed public sector cuts on voluntary and community organisations which may undermine the promotion of equality of opportunity;
- ❑ the approach of the Home Office and longstanding concerns in relation to criminal justice and policing issues;
- ❑ the adverse impact of aspects of the Localism Bill and the Public Bodies Bill.

Principally, we are concerned that the combined impact of these changes will reduce the ability of people with protected characteristics, to secure continued progress towards equality and social justice, and challenges to discrimination.

As government departments have moved to implement the range of policies we look at in this research, there is some evidence that the reality of adverse impacts on people with protected characteristics will occur (we would argue that the term 'protected characteristics' is clunky and that any social justice framework as recommended through this research needs to consider an alternative term). In the impact assessments, these adverse impacts have, in most cases, been mitigated through aspects of policy. Our initial research would suggest that any mitigation that has been introduced is limited and that there will be major adverse effects for disabled people, women, BME communities, older people, the young and disadvantaged people with all the protected characteristics.

⁸ 'Equality is at the heart of this Coalition Government. It is fundamental to building a strong economy and a fairer society; and in these difficult economic times equality is even more important ...it is essential that we make sure that we benefit from the talents of everyone in the UK. As we take difficult decisions necessary to tackle the UK's record deficit we are determined to do so fairly, protecting the most vulnerable and prioritising equal opportunities for all.' [The Equality Strategy - Foreword by the Minister for Women & Equalities, Theresa May]

The weakening of the regulatory structures implied by the Government's policies will substantially weaken attempts to seriously address these issues and genuinely promote equality. As we write, the uncertainty regarding the future of equalities under the present government has been brought into question by a number of other factors. These include:

- ❑ current delays and revisions in the proposed specific duties under the Equality Act 2010 which may weaken the public sector's role in driving equality;
- ❑ the Government has placed the Equality Act 2010, in its entirety on the 'Red Tape' website⁹, in effect, inviting comment on the whole of equality legislation. The red tape website invites comment from the public on any area of legislation in a bid to improve transparency and reduce bureaucracy;
- ❑ the Government's Equality Strategy signals both a movement away from equality of outcome based policy-making and towards the vague, relative and immeasurable concept of 'fairness' and a questioning of the current law on equalities.

2.2 The notion of localism

2.2.1 The policy

The Localism Bill¹⁰ was published on 13 December 2010. The aim of the Bill:

'To make the case for a radical shift of power from the centralised state to local communities.'

To achieve this ambition, the Coalition Government hopes to re-localise the running of services, with an emphasis upon communities running services in their neighbourhoods. Indeed, the Coalition Government's attempts to decentralise and localise run in parallel to the emerging big society agenda whereby communities take greater responsibility for the design and delivery of public services. The Bill, also scheduled for Royal Assent towards the end of 2011, introduced greater powers for communities to shape the development of their local area via Neighbourhoods Plans.

2.2.2 The theoretical impact of localism upon equalities

Key equalities focused, and potential theoretical impacts of the localism notion, are as follows:

- ❑ changes to the specific equality duties on local authorities means that EqIA would not be a requirement and there will be a weaker regulation of equality through the Equality and Human Rights Commission and the Government Equality Office. There is a major risk that the management of equality at a local level will be weakened;
- ❑ how do we ensure that the needs of marginalised groups are met? The diversification of public service suppliers means that the State has less control over the design and delivery of services. With increasing pressures to do more with less, the cuts might mean that service providers focus on those who are successfully accessing their services already, therefore excluding the most marginalised members of the community.

2.2.3 The equality impact assessment of localism by government

The Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) has produced guidance on EqIA. An overarching Impact Assessment has been carried out for the Localism Bill, which looks at equality, economic impact and environmental impacts in relation to a number of other policy areas. With regard to the Single Equality Duty (this brings together policy affecting groups with protected characteristics into a single piece of legislation), the sole reference is as follows:

⁹ <http://www.redtapechallenge.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/home/index>

¹⁰ HM Government (2010) Localism Bill <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/lbill/2010-2012/0090/2012090v1.pdf>

'Equalities screens have been completed for all the policies in the Bill. The results are outlined in the relevant individual impact assessment. The following policies identified a potential equalities impact and therefore completed a full Equalities Impact Assessment: Abolishing the Standards Board Regime; Neighbourhood Planning; Homelessness provisions; Abolishing the Tenant Services Authority. These will be published separately. We also aim to publish a full Equalities Impact Assessment on the Social Housing Tenure provisions following consultation.'¹¹

There are four EqIA's published on the CLG website, all other assessments have been conducted on an 'Impact Assessment' template as described in Appendix 5. This means that, with the exception of the areas above, all other aspects of the Bill were considered to have 'no impact' in relation to equalities. This conclusion was drawn through an equality screening process that, it is claimed, follows the EHRC guidance.

This means that the overall Bill, and many of its constituent parts, was considered to have no equality impact. Looking at the EqIA's undertaken we presume the EHRC guidance has concluded that there is a risk that people from black and ethnic minorities and disabled people may be disadvantaged, both through low levels of participation. A number of proposals are set out for mitigating these problems through advice and guidance and the inspection process for neighbourhood development plans. However, the EqIA is deficient in relation to community consultation where it makes the following point:

'The broad outline of the policy was set out before the election and included in the Coalition Agreement and we are currently consulting a range of special interest groups who have expressed a desire to contribute to the development of the policy. No groups representing black, Asian and minority ethnic communities or people with disabilities have yet come forward to express concerns about the proposals but, if they do so, we shall discuss their concerns with them and consider how they may be addressed.'

The other impact assessments contain measurements in accordance with the specific duties for mitigation, and accompany the potential impacts that are identified.

2.3 The notion of big society

2.3.1 The policy

The big society has emerged as the landmark policy of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government. For the Coalition, the big society is a vision for greater personal, professional and civic responsibility where social problems are solved by the communities they affect; social action is prioritised over state intervention. In a speech last summer¹², Prime Minister David Cameron set out three key themes underpinning the big society:

- 1) **social action** – the big society is a call for people to give up their time, effort and money to support local causes as part of a new culture of voluntarism and philanthropy;
- 2) **public service reform** – for the Coalition Government, state intervention has extended too far and public services need to be opened up to alternative deliverers, including charities, social enterprises, communities and private companies, with the aim of encouraging more innovation, diversity and responsiveness to public need;
- 3) **community empowerment** – with the big society agenda, the Coalition Government hopes to increase levels of personal responsibility and encourage communities to become more self reliant.

2.3.2 The theoretical impact of big society upon equalities

Key equalities focused, and potential theoretical impacts of the big society notion, are as follows:

¹¹ Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011

¹² Transcript of a speech by the Prime Minister on the Big Society, 19 July 2010 <http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/big-society-speech/>

- ❑ **who has the capacity to participate in the big society?** – as highlighted in a publication by the New Economics Foundation (nef)¹³, not all individuals have the same capacity to help themselves and to help others. Levels of capacity depend on a range of factors, including: education and income; family circumstances; environment; knowledge; and confidence. Clearly, some individuals, particularly those from marginalised communities, will struggle to participate. People with disabilities might face barriers in accessing locations in which decisions are made; whilst those who do not speak English as a first language may struggle to engage with the decision making process;
- ❑ **will the big society fail to tackle inequalities?** – the barriers that prevent individuals from getting involved in their local communities are often rooted in structural inequalities in society. Whilst individuals coming together can have a powerful role in solving local problems, this must go hand in hand with structural changes to society and the economy. Not only might the big society agenda fail to tackle inequalities, it might actually exacerbate inequalities by failing to meet the needs of marginalised groups;
- ❑ **can voluntary and community sector suppliers retain their capacity to challenge and contest?** – the big society agenda potentially presents opportunities for voluntary and community sector equalities organisations to bid to deliver public services that are targeted to the needs and challenges of marginalised groups. However, questions remain as to what impact the shift towards service delivery will have on voluntary and community sector equalities organisations' ability to act as advocates for marginalised groups.

2.3.3 The equality impact assessment of big society by government

The big society agenda is managed through the Office of Civil Society, which was established in the Cabinet Office in May 2010 to work across government departments to *'translate the big society agenda'* into practical policies. The Cabinet Office has developed an internal guidance document on the conduct of EqIA's but has not indicated how this would apply to initiatives around the big society. At present, there is no evidence of EqIA's being conducted around this agenda.

2.4 The reform of welfare

2.4.1 The policy

Reforming the welfare system, and tackling unemployment and worklessness in particular, has been a key priority of the Coalition Government. There are two key elements of the reforms:

- 1) **the introduction of the Work Programme** – the Work Programme is the rolling of all previous worklessness programmes – including the Working Neighbourhoods Fund, the Future Jobs Fund and Pathways to Work – into one initiative. The Work Programme will be administered at a sub-regional level by a number of prime contractors who are, in most cases, private sector organisations, such as A4E and SEETEC. It is intended that employment support will then be delivered by a series of sub-contractors from the private and voluntary and community sectors, operating at the local and neighbourhood levels;
- 2) **the move towards a Universal Credit** – the Universal Credit is, along with the Work Programme, a landmark feature of the Coalition Government's welfare reforms. It represents a move towards a system that brings together existing income related out of work benefits and Tax Credits into what the Coalition Government hopes will be a simpler and more highly integrated system.

2.4.2 The theoretical impact of welfare reform upon equalities

Key equalities focused, and potential theoretical impacts of the welfare reform agenda, are as follows:

- ❑ **how will changes to the benefits system affect marginalised groups?** – the Coalition Government has an overall ambition to reduce the cost of welfare to the public purse. One of the steps that the Government is taking to achieve this is the 'crackdown' on incapacity claimants.

¹³ New Economics Foundation (2010) *Ten Big Questions about the Big Society*
http://www.neweconomics.org/sites/neweconomics.org/files/Ten_Big_Questions_about_the_Big_Society.pdf

Since 4 April 2011, claimants have been written to and asked to resubmit their assessments. The Government hopes that this process will identify claimants that can be moved off Employment Support Allowance (ESA) and onto Jobseeker's Allowance. Critics have challenged the format of the assessment, whilst the Disability Alliance has warned that it may result in an increase in disability poverty;

- ❑ **does the Work Programme provide real incentives for people to move into employment?** – questions remain as to whether the Work Programme has been designed correctly, in terms of the financial incentives available to providers supporting claimants who require intensive and longer term support.

The current Work Programme only offers a real difference in payment levels once a claimant is placed into employment for thirteen weeks, something which might be difficult given the current job market and the complexity of health related barriers that ESA claimants will need support to overcome. This could encourage 'cherry picking' while truly individualised support is unaffordable. As such, to what extent will the Work Programme be able to tackle structural, entrenched disadvantages in the labour market?

- ❑ **to what extent do prime contractors understand equalities issues?** – overcoming the inequalities in the labour market will require tailored, bespoke and holistic services that understand the barriers that marginalised communities might face in accessing the labour market. What is the track record of prime contractors in delivering this? There is also a concern over whether Work Programme prime contractors fully understand the diversity of the voluntary and community sector, and whether they have knowledge of the activities of equalities focused groups in particular.

2.4.3 The equality impact assessment of welfare reform by government

EqIA within the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is set in the context of the Treasury's High Level Impact Assessment 'Overview of the impact of Spending Review 2010 on Equalities'¹⁴. The Treasury document is of limited value, in that while it points to potential equality impacts, it does not provide any framework or guidance to government departments on how it would seek to deal with adverse impacts; it leaves the responsibility to individual departments. We could not find a corresponding document on spending cuts in the list of EqIA published by the DWP. There is however a comprehensive set of EqIA's that have been produced by the DWP in relation to welfare reform.

The model adopted by the DWP follows the same pattern as in the CLG, where equality screening is conducted through a general Impact Assessment and, where considered necessary, an EqIA is carried out.

The assessment on Universal Credit is an example of the procedure used. It differs from the CLG approach in widening the scope of the assessment to address the protected characteristics under the 2010 Act, though in relation to sexual orientation and gender reassignment, religion and belief or pregnancy and maternity, it could not assess these because of lack of data. The DWP conducted a consultation on the Universal Credit which refers to support for a simpler benefits system but does not demonstrate how this has informed the understanding of Equality Impact. They also refer to a stakeholder forum but, again, it is not clear how this informs the EqIA. In practice, the assessment covers race, gender, disability and age, and identifies positive and negative impacts. The overall assessment claims a positive impact for the Universal Credit system and where negative impacts are identified these are largely justified rather than mitigated. The assessment on Disability Living Allowance (DLA) follows the same pattern, with few problems identified through negative impacts.

The risk of negative impact identified under the impact assessment for DLA reads as follows:

¹⁴ HM Treasury, 2010

'Proposals to replace DLA with a new benefit better focused on supporting people to overcome barriers to participation provide an opportunity to promote equality of opportunity for disabled people least likely to live full and active lives. However, as the benefit becomes better targeted on those with the greatest needs it is likely that some disabled people, who may have self-assessed as needing support, but who have lesser barriers to participation, will receive reduced support. This is in line with the policy aim to focus support on those with the greatest barriers to leading full and active lives. As the assessment is developed further work will be undertaken to assess its likely impact, which will inform subsequent EqIA.¹⁵

2.5 The reform of health

2.5.1 The policy

The NHS White Paper '*Equity and excellence: Liberating the NHS*'¹⁶ was published in July 2010 and set out the Coalition Government's long term vision for the future of the National Health Service. One of the key ambitions of the White Paper is that of autonomy, accountability and democratic legitimacy:

'The Government's reforms will empower professionals and providers, giving them more autonomy and, in return, making them more accountable for the results they achieve, accountable to patients through choice and accountable to the public at the local level.'

The most prominent, and indeed contentious, proposals within the White Paper are the changes to GP commissioning: in particular, that of giving clinicians greater control over health budgets with the aim of improving efficiency and effectiveness in healthcare. Running in parallel to the Coalition Government's localism agenda, the reforms believe that because medics are closer to their patients, they are better placed to direct resources where they are needed, and less likely to be wasteful. Moreover, in opening up the provision of public health related services to a diversity of suppliers, including the public and private sectors, it is hoped that the reforms will promote greater efficiency.

In November 2010, the Department of Health published the White Paper '*Healthy lives, healthy people: Our strategy for public health in England*'¹⁷. The White Paper proposed that power and responsibility for tackling public health issues, such as smoking, obesity and excessive drinking, will be transferred to local authorities.

2.5.2 The theoretical impact of health reform upon equalities

Key equalities focused, and potential theoretical impacts of the health reforms, are as follows:

- ❑ **how do we ensure accountability?** – as a briefing by the British Medical Association¹⁸ notes, although the White Paper stated that GP led consortia would be legal entities, the Health Bill is unlikely to be prescriptive about their status, for example, whether they are partnerships, Limited Liability Partnerships (LLPs), companies or social enterprises. There is clearly a need to ensure clear duties and accountability in any emerging structures: open and transparent decision making will be vital in order to maintain patient confidence, to protect patients' interests, ensure equal access and to avoid conflicts of interest;
- ❑ **how do we ensure consistency?** – devolving powers and responsibilities to GP-led consortia and to local authorities raises concerns about consistency across different geographies. Research by the Race Equality Foundation¹⁹ with Black and Minority Ethnic led voluntary and community organisations uncovered wide regional disparity in the relationship between the voluntary and community sector and the NHS. There are therefore concerns around ensuring the needs of marginalised communities are met and that they have equal access to health services;

¹⁵ Department for Work and Pensions, 2011

¹⁶ Department of Health (2010) *Equity and excellence: liberating the NHS*

http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/@ps/documents/digitalasset/dh_117794.pdf

¹⁷ Department of Health (2010) *Healthy Lives, Healthy People: our strategy for public health in England*

http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/documents/digitalasset/dh_127424.pdf

¹⁸ British Medical Association (2010) *BMA response to the Health White Paper*

http://www.bma.org.uk/images/whitepaperbmbriefingdec2010_tcm41-202540.pdf

¹⁹ Race Equality Foundation (2011) *Informed conversations with black and minority ethnic-led voluntary and community organisations on health and social care change*

<http://www.raceequalityfoundation.org.uk/publications/consultation-responses/informed-conversations-BME-VCO-on-health-changes>

- ❑ **will reforms encourage competition rather than efficiency?** – a key element of the health service reforms and the localism agenda more broadly is that of opening up service delivery to a diversity of suppliers. The BMA have expressed concerns that creating a purchaser-provider split and the introduction of payment by results could discourage the type of collaboration between providers that can be so important for meeting the needs of marginalised groups with multiple barriers to improved health. Moreover, the introduction of any payment on results system inevitably opens up the risk that providers target 'quick wins', i.e. people that are already engaged with health providers, rather than those with entrenched challenges and barriers.

2.5.3 The equality impact assessment of health reform by government

The Department of Health (DoH) again follows the approach of other departments with general Impact Assessments, which contain an equalities screening, supplemented by more detailed EqIA. The DoH has provided a coordinating document so that the relationship between Impact Assessments and EqIA's is more transparent. EqIA's have been produced in six areas: commissioning for patients; regulating providers; local democratic legitimacy; Health Watch; public bodies; and public health.

The EqIA's are conducted with reference to all protected characteristics and is based on evidence and stakeholder feedback. The stakeholder feedback is documented within the EqIA's and for each of the protected characteristics a set of potential impacts are identified and actions presented that might provide mitigation or opportunities to promote equality. There is, however, no attempt to critically evaluate how effective mitigation might be in relation to the equality risks that are identified.

Unlike the EqIA's from other government departments, the DoH has used consultation events with stakeholders that represent equalities issues and concerns (e.g. a stakeholder event looking at Foundation Trust proposals). Despite the efforts that have been made in the EqIA's conducted in the Department of Health to better understand the policies as an interconnected whole, this ambition is not carried through into the analysis of equality impact which is limited to each of the individual strands of the policy.

2.6 The reform of economic growth

2.6.1 The policy

The White Paper '*Local growth, realising every place's potential*'²⁰ was published in 2010 and set out the Coalition Government's vision for a future economy that is: more balanced; not so dependent on a narrow range of economic sectors; driven by private sector growth; and environmentally sustainable. The White Paper criticised previous policy for being driven by centrally defined targets and is an attempt to shift power/responsibility from the centre and support the localism agenda through Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and the transition from Regional Development Agencies (RDAs). The White Paper introduced new powers, along with expressing support for a range of new incentives and initiatives, including a new homes bonus and tax increment financing.

The Local Growth White Paper set out plans for the Regional Growth Fund: £1.4 billion of focused investment with the aim of helping the Government address market failure by stimulating enterprise and private sector growth/jobs creation in supporting those areas currently dependent on public sector economies.

2.6.2 The theoretical impact of economic growth upon equalities

Key equalities focused, and potential theoretical impacts of the economic growth reforms, are as follows:

- ❑ **how do we ensure that opportunities lead to greater equality?** – the Local Growth White Paper is underpinned by principles of traditional economic growth (i.e. increasing GVA) and the belief that increased wealth will trickle down to the most deprived people and places. However, experience shows that this often does not happen: all too often the opportunities that economic growth brings, such as new jobs, are not enjoyed by marginalised groups – whether that is the older workforce, disabled people or certain ethnic minority communities;

²⁰ HM Government (2010) *Local growth: realising every place's potential*
<http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/corporate/docs/l/1068%20-%20local%20growth.pdf>

- ❑ **whose voices will be heard?** – the funding that has been made available through the Local Growth White Paper, the Regional Growth Fund, is being delivered via largely competitive processes. There is a real risk that the allocation of funding will exacerbate spatial inequalities between and within the regions. Moreover, the competitive nature of the Fund means that it naturally advantages those who are articulate, socially active and whose voices are already heard. Therefore, what opportunity will marginalised communities have to be involved in these emerging processes and mechanisms?
- ❑ **where does responsibility for equalities now sit?** – following the election of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition last year, it was confirmed that RDA's would be abolished and replaced by Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). With their emphasis on driving private sector growth, it is unlikely that LEPs will have the same interest in promoting equality across marginalised groups as the RDA's did. Who or what will be responsible for ensuring the legacy of this activity?

2.6.3 The equality impact assessment of economic growth reform by government

Although the Department of Business Innovation and Skills has comprehensive guidance on EqIA and its incorporation within the policy process, we could not locate any EqIA for the Local Growth White Paper.

2.7 The shift towards open public service

Since this research commenced and since the bulk of the primary research was undertaken the above policy notions and reforms have been supplemented by the Open Public Services White Paper. The White Paper is framed by five principles which cut across the service delivery agenda. The five principles are as follows:

- 1) **choice** – 'where possible we will increase choice';
- 2) **decentralisation** – 'power should be decentralised to the lowest appropriate level';
- 3) **diversity** – 'public services should be open to a range of providers';
- 4) **fairness** – 'we will ensure fair access to public services';
- 5) **accountability** – 'public services should be accountable to users and taxpayers'.

We explore these themes and their relationship to equalities issues further in the conclusions to this research.

3 IMPACT OF LOCALISM

This section of the report explores the impact of the emerging localism agenda upon equalities issues, equalities groups, and wider social and economic considerations. The evidence for each identified impact has been drawn from the focus groups with organisations and individuals representing each of the equalities strands, and a questionnaire issued to equalities focused organisations in the voluntary and community sector. The section concludes with a consideration of the key socio-economic values of embedding equalities issues into the emerging localism agenda and the socio-economic importance of voluntary and community sector equalities organisations.

3.1 Introducing localism

Since the election in May 2010, the Coalition Government has presented a strong rhetoric of decreasing the centralist and bureaucratic nature of policy, service delivery and governance structures, and implementing a new era of locally defined and delivered services, which are driven by the needs of communities. Strongly linked to the notion of big society, this concept has become defined as 'localism'. It suggests a greater role for local people, the voluntary and community sector, and local government in service design and delivery. The Government's policy commitments around localism were introduced in a White Paper in December 2010, with a Bill currently in the process of passing through Parliament. The content of the Localism Bill is based around six themes.

3.1.1 Theme 1: Reduce bureaucracy

The first theme of the Localism Bill is to reduce the burden of bureaucracy placed by central government upon local government and the voluntary and community sector. Key actions under this theme include:

- ❑ abolishing targets, including national level public service agreements and departmental targets and those collected at the local level through Local Area Agreements;
- ❑ abolition of RDA's and associated regional strategies.

3.1.2 Theme 2: Enable communities and local government to take action

The second theme of the Localism Bill is to support communities to take action and deliver services in their own neighbourhoods. Key actions under this theme include:

- ❑ the legislation of a General Power of Competence, which enables local authorities to undertake activities not prohibited by law but which address local challenges with innovative ways of working;
- ❑ the community right to buy and build, which enables communities to own assets and gives residents power to build new assets in their communities;
- ❑ the introduction of neighbourhood planning which provides communities with greater control over planning decisions through the development of a focused neighbourhood plan.

3.1.3 Theme 3: Increase local control of public finance

The third theme of the Localism Bill is to hand communities greater responsibility for the spend of public resources. Key actions under this theme include:

- ❑ the introduction of community infrastructure levies by which local authorities pay back rates to the communities from which they were raised to enable new projects;
- ❑ the opportunity to veto and stall council tax increases;
- ❑ the power to discount and potentially reinvest business rates at the local level in response to national and local challenges.

3.1.4 Theme 4: Open up public services to a broader range of suppliers

The fourth theme of the Localism Bill is to move away from the state monopoly of public services and open up service delivery opportunities to businesses, faith groups, charities and social enterprises. A key action under this theme includes:

- ❑ a community right to challenge, whereby communities can challenge the provision of services by local authorities.

3.1.5 Theme 5: Open up government finances to public scrutiny

The fifth theme of the Localism Bill is to make central and local government spending more transparent. This includes proposals to publish governmental and local government procurement spend.

3.1.6 Theme 6: Strengthen accountability to local people

The sixth theme of the Localism Bill is to strengthen the accountability of central and local government to local communities. Key actions under this theme include:

- ❑ opportunities for councillors to instigate referendums on key issues of local importance;
- ❑ opportunities for the twelve largest English cities to hold referendums on the introduction of directly elected mayors.

3.2 Common impacts

Clearly, many of the proposals identified above are still passing through the legislative process and indeed a number have already fallen off the policy and political radar. There are however a number of emerging impacts from the localism agenda upon equalities issues, equalities groups and wider social and economic considerations.

3.2.1 Impact 1 – A changing geography of institutions and access to services

The localism agenda is changing the geography at which certain services and strategy are delivered. This is particularly prevalent in economic development where the move is from the regional scale in the form of RDA's to the sub-regional scale in the form of Local Enterprise Partnerships. Equally, despite its rhetoric, localism is also seeing a reduced role for the economic development function in local authorities. It is also prevalent in the health agenda where responsibility for health commissioning is moving away from sub-regional level Primary Care Trust's (PCT's) to consortiums of General Practitioners (GP's). Equally, in the welfare agenda and through the auspices of the Work Programme, we are seeing a move from specialist local and neighbourhood level employment support to more of a sub-regional focus through prime and sub-contractors. Localism therefore appears to have some natural inconsistencies around the correct geography of delivery.

This changing geography of institutions has impacts for both service users and voluntary and community sector organisations. For the service user, changes to the geography of institutions and associated services changes the ease at which services can be accessed. New geographies mean that users will have to travel further to reach support activities, and that specialist services previously provided at the neighbourhood level will be lost as the notion of localism is twinned with cuts to public expenditure. Distance travelled to reach services will be particularly prevalent for disabled people given the further changes to DLA and cuts to Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) in respect of young people. The loss of specialist services will be particularly prevalent for BME communities, where trust is often a key consideration, resulting in historically poor take up of mainstream provision and a greater focus on specialist and community led provision. This is equally important for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans communities.

For each of these groups, rurality and other barriers to service provision will be an added challenge. A 2009 study by the Centre for Public Health at Liverpool John Moores University²¹ suggested that there was a strong correlation between socio-demographic factors and the distance travelled to reach care, particularly for people with HIV and those living in rural communities. They travelled an average of 4.8km for care, rising to 16.1km for people living in rural areas. This was found to be particularly prevalent in the North West and in rural localities such as Cumbria.

²¹ Centre for Public Health, Liverpool John Moores University (2009) *Influence of socio-demographic factors on distance travelled to access HIV services: enhanced surveillance of HIV patients in North West England*
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2662835>

For voluntary and community sector organisations, particularly those with an equalities slant, the changing geography of institutions and service delivery means that a whole new set of relationships and partnerships need to be developed.

Over the last ten years and through Local Strategic Partnerships, Neighbourhood Management, and area based initiatives, voluntary and community sector organisations have developed key relationships with local authorities, employment agencies, health providers and, importantly, commissioners and grant providers within these bodies. This has led to the commissioning and provision of services which are embedded in the needs of the community and which is specialist to particular groups. This was also helped by the equalities commitment of the previous government:

*'We are concerned about governance as we were able to influence the previous structures, institutions and boards. We are concerned that GP practices will not understand our needs.'*²²

The changing geography of institutions and associated geography of delivery will affect the organisations which responded to our questionnaire. Nearly 50% of organisations described their primary focus of activities as being at neighbourhood or local authority levels with just under 25% suggesting they focused across a sub-region, the geographical level policy is predominantly moving towards. Comparing this to the results of National Survey of Charities and Social Enterprise²³ it is clear that the figures are higher than the national average of 45% of organisations describing their primary focus being at neighbourhood or local authority levels.

Localism means that provision and geography of institution is changing and the vehicles of funding, if still around, are also changing. New relationships are therefore required with GP consortia, LEPs, and Work Programme prime contractors. All this relationship building takes time with associated impact upon delivery of services and projects.

There is also a challenge here in terms of lack of coordination between policies and geographies, leaving confusion for voluntary and community sector groups as to what their best geographical area of focus is and how this fits with the communities which they represent, and the influence they can achieve:

*'But now what is local, the LEP is a particular geography, the GP's are another... localism for whom. There is no coordination... it is difficult to have any element of influence.'*²⁴

3.2.2 Impact 2 – A question over the importance placed in the public sector on monitoring

The localism agenda seeks to remove some of the top-down bureaucracy associated with the delivery of services and special initiatives. With the removal of Local Area Agreements and other monitoring arrangements comes the withdrawal of a whole host of evidence about the performance of localities and the needs facing communities in thematic terms such as around employment and health. There are also questions over the future importance of monitoring. Whilst public sector organisations can see monitoring as burdensome, it provides an important source of data for voluntary and community sector organisations providing specialist services. Monitoring can be particularly important in identifying the needs of particular communities and for making up for some of the inadequacies of national datasets, particularly around groups with protected characteristics (e.g. the Census is notoriously poor in identifying the size of lesbian, gay and bisexual groups in communities, meaning that the provision of services is neglected):

*'The Office of the National Statistics suggests that 1.5% of the population is lesbian, gay or bisexual. Our estimation is 7% from 2004. Poor data means that commissioners feel they don't need to fund specialist services as it is only 1.5% of the population.'*²⁵

To provide specialist services, commissioners need to understand the needs of communities and importantly the demand for services. Voluntary and community sector organisations therefore need to continue to monitor and highlight to commissioners that there is a need, for example, for an employment support programme for trans groups in Manchester. There is also a challenge in monitoring around geography. The geography of lesbian, gay, and bisexual communities and other groups with protected characteristics is often not correlated to administrative geographies and often not neighbourhoods. There is therefore a challenge in localism in that these groups are at risk of being excluded from local decision making because of their often invisibility in the community.

²² Questionnaire respondent

²³ Source of data: <http://www.ncscsurvey.com>

²⁴ Disability focus group participant

²⁵ LGB focus group participant

3.2.3 Impact 3 – Increased incidences of harassment and hate crime

The changing geography of institutions, the reduced provision of specialist services, and the changing geography of service provision has implications for both the incidences of hate crime and harassment, and reporting of such incidences. For people with disabilities and trans groups, equalities specific voluntary and community sector organisations at the neighbourhood or local authority level have become key means through which they can access support and report issues around hate crime and harassment.

Given the current state of the UK economy, issues around rising employment and increased tension within communities, it is likely that these support and reporting mechanisms are more likely to be needed rather than less likely.

The above statement is backed up by the latest incidences of hate crime statistics from the Association of Chief Police Officers²⁶. Whilst incidences of hate crime across the protected characteristics went down from 51,920 in 2009 to 48,127 in 2010, two characteristics are noted for significant increases. Hate crimes against disabled people increased by 21% over the year from 1,294 in 2009 reported crimes to 1,569 reported crimes in 2010. Hate crimes against trans people increased by 14% from 312 in 2009 to 357 in 2011. Homophobic hate crimes also increased by around 2%.

As a result of localism and associated funding cuts, service provision is moving away from a neighbourhood and specialist focus towards a more sub-regional and centralised focus, meaning a lack of understanding of where disabled, lesbian, gay and bisexual, and trans groups need to go for support and how they report incidences of hate crime and harassment:

*'Hate crime is going to be under reported as there isn't local places or mechanisms to report it.'*²⁷

3.2.4 Impact 4 – A dilution of the regional tier and associated equalities commitment

The localism and big society agendas have often been described as a smoke screen for cuts in public expenditure and a core driver in removing the regional tier of governance and funding in England. Whilst the RDA's have had their criticisms, particularly around accountability to communities, they have provided a host of programmes and projects that have stimulated economic development, particularly in the North West of England. One area in which the RDA's have been particularly effective in championing has been around equalities and supporting agendas around BME and women's enterprise development and sustainability. There has also been a general recognition within the RDA's of the importance of equalities; indeed the North West Regional Development Agency (NWDA) had a dedicated equalities team.

Localism has seen the dilution of the regional tier, with the removal of the RDA's and associated Regional Leaders Forums such as 4NW. With this dilution has gone a string of specific expertise and funding programmes, such as the one described above around BME and women's enterprise; together with the commitment to equalities issues at the regional level:

*'There is no joined up service anymore; the equalities team at the RDA were made redundant.'*²⁸

This all has impacts on economic development and the specialist support provided to set up enterprise and business. It also has an impact in terms of learning through the loss of equalities specialism, knowledge and lessons learnt which is not being transferred to the central or local levels through localism agendas.

The dilution of the regional tier also has implications for equalities strands where it has been historically difficult to develop and sustain local specialist organisations. This has been particularly prevalent for lesbian, gay and bisexual communities where services have often been provided at a regional level or at a central level with outreach support. Local or neighbourhood level services are often simply not cost effective, meaning that the drive towards localism will see vital regionally administered activities threatened and a lack of local capacity to pick up the challenges and needs of communities:

²⁶ Date sourced at: <http://www.acpo.police.uk>

²⁷ LGB focus group participant

²⁸ Women's focus group participant

*'There is a perception that it is a zero cost option. LGBT works well because it has a space where lots of support groups can meet. This is threatened by localism as this is not sustainable at the local level.'*²⁹

3.2.5 Impact 5 – The capacity to deliver and the challenges of procurement

One of the core objectives of the Localism Bill is to open up the delivery of services to a broader range of suppliers. This provides a problem for equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations as they are often small organisations offering very specialist services to an individual equalities strand or a combination of equalities strands, financed through grant finance, donations or local authority commissioning. The problem is twofold:

- 1) equalities focused organisations are often small and do not readily have the capacity to bid for contracts through procurement processes and indeed deliver local authority services;
- 2) local authority service delivery is becoming broader with an expectation that providers deliver against multiple outcomes as opposed to individual and specialised services.

In fact, as opposed to opening up local authority markets to equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations, it actually restricts opportunities and opens them up far more to supra-charities, such as Age Concern and private sector service deliverers:

*'Localism, it sounds great to have bespoke services. But if you look at the procurement system how would local groups manage to do that? It favours the large groups.'*³⁰

The above concerns over tarring all voluntary and community sector organisations needing to be service deliverers, is also reflected in the evidence submitted to the Government by the Third Sector Research Centre around big society³¹. They suggest that:

'Not all voluntary and community organisations necessarily need, or wish to, take on a greater role in delivering services.'

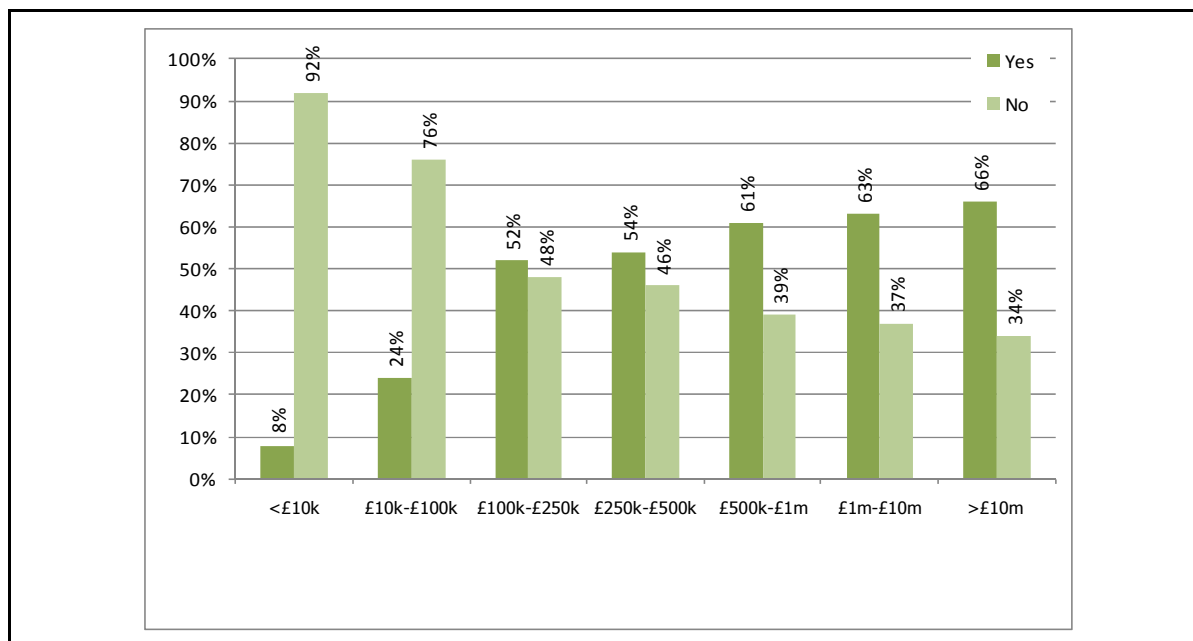
This is also reflected in 2009 data from the Charities Commission³² detailing the small number of voluntary and community sector organisations actually in receipt of public sector grants and contracts. Only 12% of small voluntary and community sector organisations are in receipt of public sector contracts or grants compared to 34% in large voluntary and community sector organisations. 2010 data from the National Survey of Charities and Social Enterprise (ibid) suggests that only 12% of voluntary and community sector organisations are in contractual arrangements with local authorities. Figure 1 highlights the proportion of organisations delivering public services by income size. This has been sourced from the Charities Commission. It is clear that very few small organisations deliver public services, which has implications for service access and choice for those living in the most marginalised communities.

²⁹ LGB focus group participant

³⁰ Older people focus group participant

³¹ Parliament UK (2010) *Smaller Government: Bigger Society? Written evidence submitted by the ESRC Third Sector Research Centre* <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmpubadm/writev/smaller/bs102.htm>

³² Charity Commission (2009) *Charities and the economic downturn* <http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/Library/downturn.pdf>

Figure 1: Proportion of voluntary and community sector organisations delivering public services by income size

Capacity around equalities and bespoke services is not just an issue for the voluntary and community sector; public sector cuts threaten the capacity of local authorities to manage and monitor equality (despite in the majority of cases having a continued commitment) and indeed adhere to the requirements of the equalities legislation:

*'I agree that management of equality at a local level will be weakened with the localism agenda.'*³³

Thus far, equalities issues and equalities groups have not had a greater influence upon service provision and service delivery as a result of localism. From the evidence of this research it might be likely that as a result of localism and cuts local authorities and others will provide generic as opposed to bespoke and specialist services:

*'The shift to localism means that there would be a loss rather than a gain in terms of the influence of older people on policies and services.'*³⁴

3.2.6 Impact 6 – It will favour those with the greatest voice

The introduction in the Localism Bill of the community right to buy, build, and challenge, and the opportunity to develop neighbourhood plans look pretty positive commitments to supporting communities to take control of their locality and the services provided within them. The challenge here however is that these proposals favour those communities with the greatest voice and the most affluent. In areas where there are strong incidences of social capital and community activism, policies such as community right to buy seem a key opportunity for community development and influence.

However, what about the communities which have not traditionally had a voice in community decision making or those living in deprived areas where self-sustainability rather than community sustainability is the biggest concern; these are the groups which need the support to engage in such opportunities. Equality of opportunity to participate must be taken into account. Historically, niche voluntary and community sector organisations focusing upon older people or BME communities or lesbian, gay and bisexual communities could have helped in providing this voice; however with funding cuts, it can be argued that localism and the policies described above actually further marginalise rather than support those with the weakest voice in local decision making:

*'There are places where community activity can happen. They are affluent; but the deprived areas are going to struggle.'*³⁵

³³ Older people focus group participant

³⁴ Older people focus group participant

³⁵ Young people focus group participant

The statements above are backed up in relation to the most recent findings from the place survey³⁶ in relation to National Indicator 4 (percentage of residents who agree that they can influence decisions affecting their local area) and National Indicator 3 (percentage of residents involved in civic participation in the local area). Taking National Indicator 4 as an example, 23% of people in Wigan (a relatively deprived local authority) feel that they can influence local decision making compared to 33.5% in Carlisle. Similarly, for National Indicator 3, 8.8% of residents are involved in civic participation in St Helens (a relatively deprived local authority) compared to 15.7% in Ribble Valley (a relatively affluent local authority).

Changes in policy, particularly around localism and associated funding cuts, are having an impact upon the advocacy and lobbying activities of voluntary and community sector organisations. Many organisations with an equalities focus are fighting simply to survive rather than provide this advocacy role. This is a particular challenge for providers of services for young people. Here, vast swathes of services are being streamlined and removed, accompanied by a removal of representative organisations. This is having implications for youth unemployment, health and wellbeing issues, and public disorder, with the recent riots a potential consequence of such advocacy removal:

*'Generally, the perception of young people is not a positive one... advocates for young people are disappearing; there is a lack of involvement as there is no one to drive it.'*³⁷

3.2.7 Impact 7 – A reduction in referral mechanisms

The foundation of equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations has often been laid by the referral of individuals for specialist support from other public service providers, such as a job adviser, a health practitioner, or a community development worker. The supply and demand side of this relationship is being disintegrated, meaning there is a lack of referral organisations for a BME person with mental health problems and a lack of services or activities to refer them to as a result of cuts in roles and funding.

This reduction in referral mechanisms potentially leaves vast swathes of vulnerable people not knowing where to turn for initial support and referred specialist advice. Large organisations such as the Citizens Advice Bureau are also facing funding cuts which restricts their capacity and ability to refer people onwards. It is also important to recognise that groups such as BME communities, young people and the disabled face multiple challenges and are in effect creating the biggest demand for referral and specialist support:

*'Community development workers have gone, so who is looking at the needs of the mental health of BME communities. We normally refer them to the voluntary sector, but increasingly there is no one to refer people to. The services were well used and there is now a huge gap in services. The Manchester advice centre is closed, the local CAB closed, other CAB no longer have the capacity to deal with these issues. This is a massive impact for service users.'*³⁸

3.3 Exploring the socio-economic implications of emerging localism policy and equalities impact

The above analysis has drawn out the key common impacts of the localism notion for equalities issues and equalities groups. In Table 2 we summarise these key common equalities impacts alongside each emerging policy development before exploring the wider socio-economic implications of the policy. In Table 3 we then explore the applicability of each common impact by protected characteristic, recognising that some will have different levels of impact for groups. This is evidenced from the extent to which focus group participants felt it was an impact for the protected characteristic which they represented.

³⁶ Data sourced at: <http://oneplace.audit-commission.gov.uk/Pages/default.aspx>

³⁷ Young people focus group participant

³⁸ Women's focus group participant

Table 2: Common equalities impacts and socio-economic implications of localism

Policy area	Common equalities impact	Socio-economic implications
Changing geographies of institutions and service provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More difficult to access services and more distance to travel for service users. • Cuts and removal of specialist services and neighbourhood level services. • Loss of networks and partnerships for equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations. • Fewer reporting mechanisms and areas of support for hate crime. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased marginalisation of groups with protected characteristics. • Increased uncertainty, community tension and worklessness. • Reduced joint working and place resilience. • Reduced referral mechanisms for vulnerable people. • Increased hate crime and harassment for groups with protected characteristics.
Reduction of bureaucracy and targets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of understanding of communities needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced investment in areas and neighbourhoods with greatest need.
Dilution of regional tier of government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of championing of equalities in business and enterprise. • Removal of equalities expertise and funding programmes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced diversity in the business base.
Opening up of public services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to engage due to size and capacity of equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monolithic public service provision.
Introduction of community rights to buy, build and challenge and neighbourhood planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marginalises communities with protected characteristics and favours those with the greatest voice and most affluence. • Reduced ability for equalities focused voluntary and community sector groups to lobby and advocate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced community influence in decision making and government policy.

Table 3: Applicability of localism equalities impact by protected characteristic

Policy area	Common equalities impact	BME	Women	Disabled	Older	Young	LGB	Trans
Changing geographies of institutions and service provision	More difficult to access services and more distance to travel for service users.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Cuts and removal of specialist services and neighbourhood level services.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Loss of networks and partnerships for equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Fewer reporting mechanisms and areas of support for hate crime.			✓			✓	✓
Reduction of bureaucracy and targets	Lack of understanding of communities needs.	✓					✓	✓
Dilution of regional tier of government	Loss of championing of equalities in business and enterprise.	✓	✓					
	Removal of equalities expertise and funding programmes.						✓	✓
Opening up of public services	Difficult to engage due to size and capacity of equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Introduction of community rights to buy, build and challenge; and neighbourhood planning	Marginalises communities with protected characteristics as favours those with the greatest voice and most affluent.	✓			✓			
	Reduced ability for equalities focused voluntary and community sector groups to lobby and advocate.			✓		✓	✓	

3.4 The value of equalities focused groups to localism

The above section has explored using evidence derived from focus groups, questionnaires and wider quantitative statistics the impact of the localism agenda upon equalities issues, equalities focused voluntary and community sector groups and wider socio-economic considerations. In this final element, we flip the argument around to argue the need for the consideration of equalities issues and groups in the roll out of the localism agenda (all quotes are from the focus groups and questionnaire):

- equalities groups provide access to specialist activities for communities with protected characteristics and services at a geographical level relevant to the notion of localism:

'We have a well respected track record of delivering.'

'Equalities groups provide a personalised service which is key to tackling embedded challenges in society.'

- equalities groups provide an important mechanism through which communities and voluntary and community sector organisations can network and work in partnership:

'Equalities still remains high on the agenda in Sefton through the development of an equalities standing group which is fed by a number of networks across protected groups.'

- equalities groups provide an important mechanism through which communities with protected characteristics can report and access support around hate crime:

'Without our presence there is no way of monitoring.'

'Equalities groups provide a means of reporting hate crime.'

- equalities groups understand implicitly the service needs of communities with protected characteristics:

'Equalities groups provide a mechanism for people who have English as a second language to engage in local decision making.'

- equalities groups provide a voice and a championing of equalities issues in business and community decision making.

4 IMPACT OF BIG SOCIETY

This section of the report explores the impact of the emerging big society agenda upon equalities issues, equalities groups and wider social and economic considerations. The evidence for each identified impact has been drawn from the focus groups with organisations and individuals representing each of the equalities strands, and a questionnaire issued to equalities focused organisations in the voluntary and community sector. The section concludes with a consideration of the key socio-economic values of embedding equalities issues into the emerging big society agenda and the socio-economic importance of voluntary and community sector equalities organisations.

4.1 Introducing the big society

The idea of the big society was presented by David Cameron in a speech to the Conservative Party Conference on 8 October 2009. The idea was further developed in *'The big society, not big government: Building a big society'*³⁹ report which states that the aim of the big society notion is to create a society where power and control are decentralised and people are empowered to solve their own problems within their communities. The Coalition Government have presented the big society and the associated localism notion as a move away from top-down state run bureaucracy, which they consider to have eroded social responsibility and subdued social action.

The notion and definition of big society has been heavily contested. Lord Wei in a Cabinet Office presentation in July 2010:

'Cast the big society as the culmination of a process of change in the public services that began with the origination and development of the Welfare State, a reigning back of public service provision after 1979, and an increasing use of markets and active government policy after 1997.'⁴⁰

ACEVO⁴¹ define the big society as:

'A society in which power and responsibility have shifted, in which at every level in our national life, individuals and communities have more aspiration, power and capacity to take decisions and solve problems themselves and where all of us take greater responsibility for ourselves, our communities and one another.'

The notion of big society policy focuses on three policy areas: public service reform; empowering communities; and social action.

4.1.1 Public service reform

'The big society, not big government: Building a big society' report states that it will *'strengthen and support social enterprises to help deliver public service reforms'* creating a big society bank in order to fund social enterprise, for which funds will be provided to intermediary bodies that have experience of successfully building social enterprise. Further funding will be made available through plans to use future revenue from the Futurebuilders programme. Futurebuilders was a Labour Government funded social enterprise programme. The importance of public service reform and principles of decentralisation and diversity of provision are further outlined in the Open Public Services White Paper.

4.1.2 Empowering communities

The notion of big society links closely with localism in emphasising the importance of neighbourhood and is intended to:

'Stimulate the creation and development of neighbourhood groups in every area.'⁴²

³⁹ Conservative Party (2009) *Big Society, Not Big Government*
http://www.conservatives.com/News/News_stories/2010/03/Plans_announced_to_help_build_a_Big_Society.aspx

⁴⁰ In Norman 2010:197

⁴¹ Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations

⁴² Conservative Party (2009) *The big society, not big government: Building a big society*

The neighbourhood development will include the training of 5000 community organisers to help communities develop the skills to manage their own community groups. Neighbourhood groups will be given new locally based powers over planning and public sector accounts. Funding will be mostly loans but grants will be provided for the UKs poorest areas and micro-funding to charities and social enterprises to work with neighbourhood groups in deprived areas.

4.1.3 Social action

The Government aims to 'encourage mass engagement in neighbourhood groups and social projects'⁴³ by making regular community service for members of the civil service through launching a big society day. The Government promises to 'catalyse social action' by making better use of 'existing civic institutions'. This will involve giving more powers and functions to town halls, post offices and allow communities to take action to safeguard community infrastructure. Alongside using existing civic organisations, the 'Big society, not big government' report also intends to create new bodies of social action, creating a National Citizens Service, that works with sixteen year olds across the country on a two month citizenship programme.

In May 2010 the new Office for Civil society (OCS) was set up to replace the Office for the Third Sector. Woodhouse states:

It [OCS] works across government departments to translate the big society agenda into practical support for voluntary and community organisations and is responsible for delivering a number of key big society programmes.'

In May 2010, the Government also published 'Building the big society' which highlighted:

'A number of areas in which policy would be developed: giving communities more powers; encouraging people to take an active role in their communities; transferring power from central to local government; supporting coops, mutuals, charities and social enterprises.'⁴⁴

In October 2010, the Government published the strategy document 'Building a stronger civil society' outlining how it intended to achieve community empowerment, opening up public services and enabling social action. The strategy document was accompanied by a consultation paper 'Supporting a stronger civil society' which included proposals for improving support to frontline civil society organisations. The consultation closed in January 2011.

The October Spending Review of 2010 announced £470 million to support the work of the OCS, including a £100 million transition fund. This funding was provided in order to:

'Provide support for the big society which will include encouraging volunteering, building the capacity of the voluntary and community sector, establishing community organisers and setting up a Community First Fund to support local and community organisations.'⁴⁵

In addition, this fund also made provision for the National Citizen Service (NCS). In November 2010 it was announced that twelve groups have been selected to run the first National Citizen Service pilot projects. The NCS programme will promote:

'A more cohesive society by mixing participants from different backgrounds, a more responsible society by supporting the transition into young adulthood for young people, a more engaged society by enabling young people to work together to create social action projects in their local communities.'⁴⁶

⁴³ Conservative Party (2009) *The big society, not big government: Building a big society*

⁴⁴ Woodhouse 2011:6

⁴⁵ Woodhouse 2011:7

⁴⁶ Woodhouse 2011:10

In November 2010, Francis Maude, Minister for the Cabinet Office and Nick Hurd Minister for Civil Society published an open letter to the voluntary sector on the outcome of the Spending Review and on key OCS programmes. The letter stated that *'cuts should not affect the voluntary sector disproportionately'*⁴⁷.

Maude set out a number of commitments in his first major speech on the big society; the opening up of services to enable the voluntary sector and social enterprise organisations to compete on a level playing field with the public and private sector, reducing regulation and red tape, and increasing the amount of resources flowing through the public sector. Maude also outlined spending commitments, which included a Communities First Fund focusing on providing start up funding to deprived communities and reiterating the role of the big society bank (Maude 2010). A joint Cabinet Office and Department for Business, Innovation and Skills Task Force is:

'To be established to explore options for simplifying the establishment of third sector organisations.'⁴⁸

The *'Big society, not big government'* report:

'Adds an explicit responsibility dimension to the value of the voluntary sector... voluntary action is seen as a route to a more responsible and mutual society with a strong culture of obligation.'⁴⁹

In December 2010, a new Compact Agreement was published. The original Compact was introduced by the Labour Government in 1998 to set out principles that would underpin the partnership between the voluntary and community sector and government. The new agreement is supported by an accountability and transparency guide.

A consultation paper on *'Modernising commissioning: Increasing the role of charities, social enterprises, mutuals and cooperatives in public service delivery'* was published in December 2010. The paper is focused on commitments made in the Coalition programme to:

'Support the creation and expansion of mutuals, cooperatives, charities and social enterprises and enable these groups to have much greater involvement in the running of public services.'⁵⁰

The paper describes how the reforms will enable a shift in power and raise quality and efficiency. The consultation paper asked four questions:

- 1) Which public service areas could the Government create new opportunities for civil society organisations to deliver?
- 2) How could the Government make existing public service markets more accessible?
- 3) How can commissioners use assessments to improve commissioning?
- 4) How can civil society organisations support greater citizen and community involvement in all stages of commissioning?

Glasman (2010)⁵¹ argues that the big society re-embeds welfare in society and, by making only limited capital available, it has created a means for judging best practice and growth. Coote continues that:

'The progressive potential of the big society lies in encouraging citizens involvement and action, recognising that everyone has assets not just problems, building and strengthening social networks, using local knowledge to get better results and offering ways of transforming the Welfare State.'⁵²

⁴⁷ Woodhouse 2011:8

⁴⁸ Alcock 2010:382

⁴⁹ Cox and Schumuecker 2010:10

⁵⁰ Woodhouse 2011: 11

⁵¹ Glasman, M (2010) *Society not State: the Challenge of the Big Society*

⁵² Coote, A (November 2010) Cutting it: The Big Society and the new austerity

Glasman (2010) states that:

'The big society offers a real opportunity for democratic renewal and active participation.'

4.2 Common impacts

Clearly, many of the proposals identified above are still passing through the legislative process and indeed a number have already fallen off the policy and political radar. Indeed there has been a key lack of policy rhetoric and prescription in 2011 around the notion of big society, fuelling the debate as to whether it is simply a smokescreen for public expenditure cuts. There are however a number of emerging impacts from the big society agenda upon equalities issues, equalities groups and wider social and economic considerations.

4.2.1 Impact 1 – A lack of understanding of what it means

As already highlighted, big society is a contested term with very little theory or practical experience. Particularly frustrating for the voluntary and community sector has been questions of what it means for them:

- Is it a mechanism for voluntary and community sector organisations to deliver public services?
- Is it a mechanism for more central government control over communities?
- Is it a way of activating communities and promoting volunteering?
- Is it a way of opening up markets away from local authorities and the voluntary and community sector, and more towards the private sector?
- Is it a cover for public sector spending cuts?

All of these questions and more emerged in our focus groups with equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations and representatives of groups with protected characteristics. The biggest concern to arise was: understanding exactly what the big society is, who it is for, and what it means for the future function and activities of their organisations. There is a widespread lack of understanding about the meaning of the big society and what the Government is seeking to achieve. This lack of understanding is exacerbated by a real lack of policy and guidance from the Government around what needs to be done within the voluntary and community sector to implement big society. Even in the big society 'vanguard' areas and as explored in Section 8 of this report there is a real lack of understanding of what the big society is for. This lack of clarity has created confusion across the sector because, for most of the participants, there was a strong sense that they were already delivering the big society through their work in the voluntary and community sector:

*'I don't understand it. I think it is already happening, some people see it as being a volunteer or campaigner, I think they would have been better to say we want a big society kind of life, but what we need is a healthy voluntary sector.'*⁵³

*'Nobody has a clue what it actually is, the voluntary sector is trying to interpret the new policies and funding cuts. It may work for little church groups but the larger voluntary sector doesn't see it as an opportunity.'*⁵⁴

The lack of understanding of big society amongst the voluntary and community sector is also reflected in the thoughts of the general public. A 2011 poll by YouGov revealed that⁵⁵:

- 63% don't understand what is meant by the big society;
- 68% think the big society will probably not work;
- 59% say it is 'mostly hot air' and a 'cover' for government cuts.

⁵³ BME focus group participant

⁵⁴ Disability focus group participant

⁵⁵ Source of data: <http://today.yougov.co.uk/politics/Brits-baffled-by-Big-Society>

The underlying principles were it was felt in the focus groups already established in a rich and diverse voluntary and community sector within the North West; the crucial difference expressed through the big society was more about funding, a strong emphasis on volunteering, and the relationship between the State and the voluntary sector:

*'It's about branding and getting people to do what they did for funding, now for free.'*⁵⁶

Equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations generally saw mistrust with the notion of big society, both from an organisational and service user perspective. They saw it as a way of removing vital publically funded services because of a perception that the voluntary and community sector could deliver it for free:

*'I see it more as a clever construct, it's a small government with more responsibility focused locally, but it takes responsibility away from central government... but then they take money away and say well we shouldn't have to pay for this because the community should be doing it.'*⁵⁷

Focus group participants also questioned the rhetorical linkages between big society and mutuality; suggesting that mutualism had been the founding point of many voluntary and community sector organisations:

*'The pressure has made us work together, not because of the big society ideas. The trade unions and cooperatives and mutuality history started in Liverpool. It's not a new concept.'*⁵⁸

The lack of engagement with the big society concept and wider emerging voluntary and community sector involvement mechanisms was reflected in the questionnaire, with only three of respondents suggesting they had been involved in a big society vanguard.

4.2.2 Impact 2 – Reduced funding and capacity for voluntary and community sector

Because of the widespread cuts in funding that have taken place, or are anticipated within the voluntary and community sector as a result of the Government's austerity programme, the issue of funding cuts was high on the agenda across all of the focus groups when discussing big society. Rather than having a positive impact upon voluntary and community sector group finances, big society for many is actually reducing and hindering access to funding, particularly through grants. The feeling was that cuts and the notion of big society were having an effect in a number of ways:

- ❑ they were affecting some services directly, youth services, health and social care, and advice services were seen to have been particularly affected;
- ❑ with the main sources of future funding coming through contracts local, well-established groups were potentially threatened by competition from large voluntary and community sector organisations and from the private sector;
- ❑ smaller voluntary and community sector organisations that supply niche and equalities group specific services, dependent both on volunteers and small grant funding to maintain their operations, were threatened by the loss of funding.

The scale of the loss of funding was made evident in the questionnaire undertaken as part of this research. Nearly 60% of organisations surveyed stated that they had already seen a reduction in funding in 2011/12 when compared to 2010/11. Less than 10% had seen an increase in funding. Research undertaken by False Economy⁵⁹ reveals the extent of the national impact of cuts upon voluntary organisations. It suggests that 2000 charities will be forced to close services and £110million of funding from local government will be removed for the voluntary and community sector.

For the equalities focused voluntary and community sector these problems were seen to have particularly damaging effects. Overall, the funding cuts were seen to be damaging equalities in the voluntary and community sector and the infrastructure that has been established over many years.

⁵⁶ Disability focus group participant

⁵⁷ BME focus group participant

⁵⁸ LGB focus group participant

⁵⁹ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2011/aug/02/voluntary-sector-cuts-fair-economy>

The concerns expressed in the focus groups about funding cuts are reinforced by the questionnaire data from organisations across the North West where cuts are already seen to be having an impact. For small organisations, in particular representing groups with protected characteristics in small geographical areas, funding cuts were a significant threat to their future sustainability:

*'There is a push into the philanthropy model of communities and corporations giving. In Liverpool we saw a paradox that the third sector needed to be thriving and able to maximise their reach... but there is no means to do it... we feel we are in a vortex and there is a key role but we can't figure out how to do that... for smaller groups they can't survive until this gets sorted without the funding.'*⁶⁰

Notably, and as highlighted in Table 4, 33 or 61.1% of voluntary and community sector organisations responding to the survey were experiencing an overall negative impact from the cuts in terms of the services they could offer to existing clients. There was also an overall negative effect noted in relation to other important functions, including:

- provision of services to new clients (31 experiencing an overall negative impact);
- the capacity to consult or lobby (25 experiencing an overall negative impact);
- working conditions for staff (22 experiencing an overall negative impact);
- conditions for volunteers (12 experiencing an overall negative impact).

Table 4: Change in organisational offer as a result of cuts and big society

Answer Option	Significant positive impact	Some positive impact	No change	Some negative impact	Significant negative impact	Don't know
Services offered to existing clients	0	2	17	19	14	2
Provision of services to new clients	0	7	17	15	16	3
Geographical coverage of your services	1	7	31	4	9	4
Partnership work	3	14	12	9	11	5
Capacity to lobby or consult	2	8	17	15	8	5
Working conditions	4	4	22	13	9	3
Conditions for volunteers	4	5	31	9	3	1

For equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations reductions in grant funding through reductions in public sector finance and the notion of big society was felt to be a specific issue for their future sustainability and the types of services they could provide for their communities of focus. Grant funding has been used to develop many organisations which undertake activities with groups with protected characteristics. However, there is currently:

- a reduction of the pot;
- greater competition for grant funding;
- a lack of recognition of particular groups requiring grant funding.

⁶⁰ Young people focus group participant

This is particularly evident amongst groups providing activities and services for lesbian, gay and bisexual communities:

*'Previous research undertaken by CLES indicated that there were no specific grants in the North West for lesbian, gay and bisexual groups.'*⁶¹

The funding previously received by equalities focused voluntary and community sector groups through donations is also on the wane, again threatening specialist services and organisational sustainability:

*'Many of the grant applications have gone up by 80%.'*⁶²

The reduced ability to advocate and lobby is another implication of the cuts in public expenditure and the notion of big society. Lobbying has formed a major strand, if not the key strand of equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations. Lobbying informs specialist service need and provision and has been integral to the development of legislation, such as the Equality Act 2010. The importance of lobbying is crucial across each of the equalities strands but more so for young people, as identified in the focus groups:

*'Generally the perception of young people is not a positive one... advocates for young people are disappearing.'*⁶³

Reduced funding also reduces the ability of equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations to engage with networks, both those which are group specific and those which are across equalities themes. Again partnership working is an important element of lobbying community of interest needs, gathering learning, and joining up activities and services:

*'The combined effect of cuts and the loss of coordination has meant a breakdown of networks and a weakening of the voluntary and community sector working together.'*⁶⁴

4.2.3 Impact 3 – Adverse impact on deprived communities

Many of the rhetorical intentions of the big society have been actively pursued by the voluntary and community sector through their organisational ethos and priorities. They have also been supported by a series of government policy initiatives over the last ten years designed to develop the capacity of the voluntary and community sector to deliver services. The worry is that the confusion around what the big society means, and the lack of understanding amongst the voluntary and community sector as to its role within it, will lead to much of this positive work being lost; a problem particularly exacerbated in deprived communities:

*'In affluent areas this may work but in poorer ones people may not have the money or time.'*⁶⁵

*'The CVS has had a massive funding cut. It couldn't happen in every area, there are places where those community activities can happen, they are affluent, but the deprived areas are going to struggle...'*⁶⁶

This worry around the ability and capacity of poorer communities to engage with the big society notion is also recognised in the policy and academic literature. Sutcliffe and Holt state:

*'Capabilities may depend on education and income, family circumstances and environment, knowledge, confidence and self of self efficacy and access to the places where decisions are taken and things get done.'*⁶⁷

⁶¹ LGB focus group participant

⁶² LGB focus group participant

⁶³ Young people focus group participant

⁶⁴ Women's focus group participant

⁶⁵ BME focus group participant

⁶⁶ Young people focus group participant

⁶⁷ Sutcliffe R & Holt, R (2011) *Who is ready for the Big Society; Research Report*

This capacity in deprived communities is significantly lower than in middle class communities⁶⁸. McCabe states:

*'This agenda could exacerbate current inequalities by favouring strong communities with the resources, skills and knowledge to engage at the cost of the voice of the disempowered.'*⁶⁹

The focus groups also recognised the links between personal and collaborative inclusion. For deprived communities, survival is about addressing financial hardship and financial exclusion at the individual level. There is simply not an interest in engaging in the community and delivering at community level. There was felt to be a particular apathy in the relationship between the community and the state which will further reduce engagement and marginalise communities:

*'Don't you feel there is a feeling in communities that people are battenning down the hatches just to get through? When you speak to communities there is apathy.'*⁷⁰

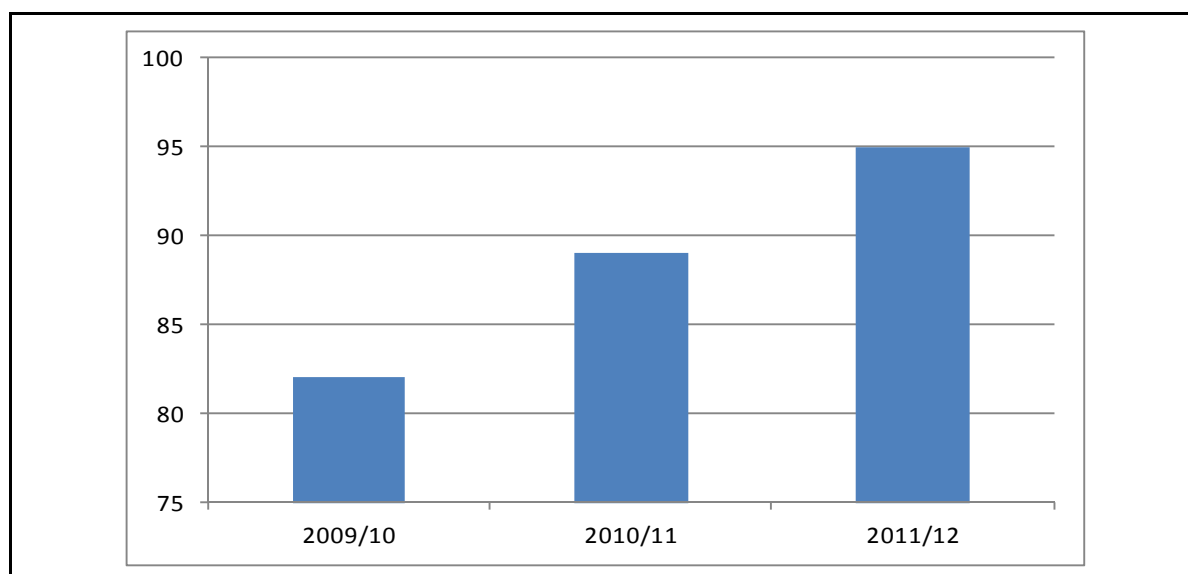
Participants in the women's focus group were particularly concerned about the impact of big society upon women and those living in deprived communities; it was felt that these groups historically lacked a voice to participate in community decision making and that big society exacerbated the challenge:

*'Specific groups don't get opportunities and deprivation means they don't get a voice. People in the area know what they want, but which groups actually participate? Is that equality? If everyone doesn't get a voice then the problems are still there.'*⁷¹

4.2.4 Impact 4 – Weakened infrastructure and support for volunteering

Volunteering is a central feature of big society and is clearly a foundation for the voluntary and community sector, however the focus groups expressed very strong concerns about the way in which volunteering was being pursued through the big society. Already, there has been a growth in volunteering, as was registered in the survey results, with an increase in the number of volunteers in the surveyed organisations on a rising trend. Figure 2 highlights the average number of volunteers working in a voluntary and community sector organisation in the North West in the years of 2009/10, 2010/11 and 2011/12. It shows the clear increase in the rise from an average of 82 in 2009/10 to an average of 95 in 2010/11. This figure is only going to rise as the number of people moving from employment to Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) increases, particularly amongst public sector employees.

Figure 2: Rising volunteer numbers



⁶⁸ ACEVO 2011:39, Kisby 2010:488

⁶⁹ 2010:15, Ransome 2011:5, Glasman 2010:62, NWIP 2011, Coote 2010, Evans 2011, Bednarek 2011

⁷⁰ BME focus group participant

⁷¹ Questionnaire respondent

This rise in volunteering in North West based equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations is also reflected in more general and national data in relation to the recession. Data released by Volunteering England revealed that⁷²:

- ❑ there had been a 30% increase in enquiries and placements for volunteering between 2008 and 2009;
- ❑ between March 2009 and August 2009, nearly nine out of ten volunteer centres saw an increase in the number of enquiries for volunteers;
- ❑ 11% of charities have increased their drive for more volunteers.

The growth in the number of volunteers was not necessarily deemed a good thing for the equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations which participated in the focus groups. The challenge is that increases in volunteering are not being coupled with an increase in funding for training volunteers. Rather there is a significant reduction in budgets for training as a result of public sector funding cuts:

*'Most of us volunteer for 3, 4, 5 different organisations as it is, but it is usually a pot of funding, even if very small, that starts a project.'*⁷³

Volunteering, it was argued, has not been a 'no-cost' option and volunteers need infrastructure and leadership to be effective. This was deemed particularly important in services and activities delivered for groups with protected characteristics where specialist knowledge and advice is a key determinant of service provision:

*'Volunteers need support and infrastructure to do their role effectively and it is very dangerous for people without training or support to do this without support.'*⁷⁴

There are also underlying problems that may limit the development of services through volunteering, as identified in the policy and academic literature:

*'The volunteering base on which the big society is built may be narrower than might appear at first flush.'*⁷⁵

British working hours are a real challenge for public engagement in the big society where the real working week of the average British worker is far more than his or her European counterparts and, as such, does not allow free time for engagement in civil society:

*'If there ever were a reserve army of volunteers its numbers might have been depleted by increasing demands on peoples time and especially greater labour markets participation.'*⁷⁶

4.2.5 Impact 5 – Dependency on volunteering may weaken quality of service

The increased dependency on volunteering was a concern for both the sustainability and the quality of services provided by the voluntary and community sector. There was recognition that while certain activities could be undertaken by volunteers, there needed to be supervision and training to ensure that the services were professional and within the law. The quality and sustainability of services was crucial in areas of social care and advice services. Services provided through the equalities focused voluntary sector are often provided by volunteers; however these activities have been supported by grants and employed staff. The big society initiative seems to show little understanding of the voluntary and community sector and how it works:

*'There is a perception that it is a free zero cost option but they need to be trained, insured and supported.'*⁷⁷

⁷² Source of data: <http://www.volunteering.org.uk/WhatWeDo/Policy/whatwearesaying/2010/Volunteering+in+the+recession.htm>

⁷³ Trans focus group participant

⁷⁴ Trans focus group participant

⁷⁵ Pattie, C & Johnson, R (2011) *How Big is the Big Society?*

⁷⁶ Ramsay (2011) Institute for Volunteering Research <http://www.ivr.org.uk/News/Thinkpieces>

⁷⁷ LGB focus group participant

*'How can there be sustainability of services without proper funding and infrastructure support.'*⁷⁸

*'I can't give everyone advice on everything, I can give welfare advice as I have done the course, but you are open to legal redress if you get it wrong.'*⁷⁹

The issue of the quality of service provided by volunteers was particularly pressing for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans communities, particularly around issues of confidentiality and specialist services around health and welfare support:

*'There is no way of controlling it – they are volunteers so will leave if you tell them something they don't like.'*⁸⁰

4.2.6 Impact 6 – Equalities role weakened through focus on neighbourhoods

A central tenet of the big society agenda is the focus on neighbourhoods as a basis for organising. As already highlighted in the policy review in Section 2, this approach will shift the focus of community towards neighbourhoods and away from a notion of a community based on common interest which lies at the heart of the equalities sector. Accompanying this is a shift from equalities to fairness. The implications of this are that resources will be focused on neighbourhoods rather than equalities, and the representation of equalities based groups will decline:

*'... And it is now fairness, not equalities... big society is what you make of it... so there is no element of equity and equality.'*⁸¹

The shifting focus towards neighbourhood carries further threat to individuals and groups seeking representation within the new structures of localism and the big society, whether they be in the work programme, the health and social care reforms, local government or LEPs. The shift from equalities to fairness, the cuts in public expenditure, and the notion of big society also represents a destructive change in the amount of equalities knowledge and specialism which has built up in the North West over the last twenty years. As a result of these policy measures, this knowledge and specialism is simply being evaporated:

*'We are losing the wealth and knowledge that is decades old, and we are losing it very fast so there is no time to collate that knowledge.'*⁸²

4.3 Exploring the socio-economic implications of emerging big society policy and equalities impact

The above analysis has drawn out the key common impacts of the big society notion for equalities issues and equalities groups. In Table 5 we summarise these key equalities impacts alongside each emerging policy development before exploring the wider socio-economic implications of the policy. In Table 6 we then explore the applicability of each common impact by protected characteristic, recognising that some will have different levels of impact for groups. This is evidenced from the extent to which focus group participants felt it was an impact for the protected characteristic which they represented.

⁷⁸ LGB focus group participant

⁷⁹ LGB focus group participant

⁸⁰ Trans focus group participant

⁸¹ Disability focus group participant

⁸² Women's focus group participant

Table 5: Common equalities impacts and socio-economic implications of big society

Policy area	Common equalities impact	Socio-economic implications
Notion of big society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of understanding amongst voluntary and community sector groups. • Loss of voice for most deprived communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced specialist activities and services. • Increased marginalisation of groups with protected characteristics. • Reduction in community involvement in decision making.
Spending cuts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in specialist support and advice services. • Reduction in grant funding. • Reduced ability for equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations to advocate and lobby. • Reduced opportunity to network and work in partnership. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased marginalisation of groups with protected characteristics and a lack of knowledge of where to go for specialist support and advice. • Reduced voluntary and community sector activity in most deprived communities. • Undemocratic decision making in local government. • Reduced community influence in policy making.
Volunteering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth in demand to provide volunteer placements. • Lack of funding to provide training for volunteers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in levels of unemployment and worklessness and continued benefit claims. • Increase in informal and unsolicited advice.
Neighbourhood focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of resources for equalities and equalities groups. • Loss of equalities knowledge and specialism. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in representative organisations. • Increase in unequal policy making and associated inequality.

Table 6: Applicability of big society equalities impact by protected characteristic

Policy area	Common equalities impact	BME	Women	Disabled	Older	Young	LGB	Trans
Notion of big society	Lack of understanding amongst voluntary and community sector groups	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Loss of voice for most deprived communities	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Spending cuts	Reduction in specialist support and advice services	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Reduction in grant funding	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Reduced ability for equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations to advocate and lobby			✓		✓	✓	
	Reduced opportunity to network and work in partnership	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Volunteering	Growth in demand to provide volunteer placements	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Lack of funding to provide training for volunteers	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Neighbourhood focus	Loss of resources for equalities and equalities groups	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Loss of equalities knowledge and specialism	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

4.4 The value of equalities focused groups to big society

The above section has explored evidence derived from focus groups, questionnaires and wider quantitative statistics which demonstrate the impact of the big society agenda upon equalities issues, equalities focused voluntary and community sector groups, and wider socio-economic considerations. In this final element we flip the argument around to argue the need for the consideration of equalities issues and groups in the roll out of the big society agenda (all quotes are from the focus groups and questionnaire):

- equalities groups provide access to specialist activities for communities with protected characteristics and services at a geographical level relevant to the notion of big society:

'We provide advice, awareness and support sessions on matters of health, wellbeing, benefits, employment and other issues; Many people in BME communities do not take up mainstream services because of cultural, religious, language, financial, or confidence barriers.'

- equalities groups provide a voice for groups with protected characteristics in community decision making and an influence over policy making through lobbying:

'Members have been historically motivated to lobby for change as a result of dissatisfaction with policy.'

- equalities groups provide an important mechanism through which communities and voluntary and community sector organisations can network and work in partnership;

- equalities groups provide opportunities for volunteering and a means through which volunteers can be trained:

'Volunteers need to be managed and cost money and resources in training terms. Equalities organisations with resource can provide this training.'

'We volunteer in all sorts of ways. Board members, forums, through wider voluntary and community sector networks.'

- equalities groups provide specialist knowledge of equalities issues and the challenges of inequality:

'We provide hope to young people and a pathway out of negative activities.'

5 IMPACT OF WELFARE REFORM

This section of the report explores the impact of the changes to the welfare reform agenda upon equalities issues, equalities groups and wider social and economic considerations. The evidence for each identified impact has been drawn from the focus groups with organisations and individuals representing each of the equalities strands, and a questionnaire issued to equalities focused organisations in the voluntary and community sector. The section concludes with a consideration of the key socio-economic values of embedding equalities issues into the welfare reform agenda and the socio-economic importance of voluntary and community sector equalities organisations.

5.1 Introducing welfare reform

One of the core policy areas of focus for the Coalition Government has been around welfare reform. This emphasis started prior to the May 2010 election through the research and lobbying activities of the now Work and Pensions Minister, Iain Duncan Smith. The basic premise of the Government's welfare agenda is to reduce benefit dependency and ensure more people are in work and contributing to the productivity of the UK economy. To reach this premise, the Government has adopted a string of policy interventions which reduce the scale of benefits, provide employment support, and reduce the specialist and individualised nature of previous employment programmes. The following section describes the key emerging policy areas and programmes; these policy areas are largely passing through Parliament in the Welfare Reform Bill⁸³.

The Welfare Reform Bill is underpinned by research by the Centre for Social Justice which identified several issues with the current welfare to work system, primarily the benefits system is too complicated and often provides limited financial incentives for claimants that enter work. The Welfare Reform Bill therefore has a dual aim of helping people to progress into work, while supporting the most vulnerable in society. The Bill seeks to achieve these aims by introducing the following policy changes:

- ❑ **introduction of a Universal Credit from 2013** – to simplify, and provide an integrated benefit system in place of Income Support (IS), JSA, ESA, Housing Benefit, Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit;
- ❑ **introduction of a single benefits 'taper rate'** – replacing the current system of varying taper rates for benefits and Tax Credits, and ensuring claimants keep at least 35p of every £1 earned when they enter work;
- ❑ **a new regime of conditionality** – meaning that payments to jobseekers will be withheld, possibly for as much as three years in the most extreme cases, if appropriate efforts are not made to progress towards work;
- ❑ **introduction of mandatory work activity** – for jobseekers who will benefit from experiencing the habits and routines of working life. The work activity will provide up to four weeks of work experience. Failure to attend without good reason could result in benefit payments being withheld.

Operating alongside the welfare reform proposals described above is the Work Programme which represents a radical new approach to the delivery of services designed to tackle worklessness. The Work Programme is the centre piece of plans to reform welfare to work delivery activity by replacing all existing provision (e.g. Pathways to Work, Working Neighbourhoods Fund and New Deal) into a single integrated programme. The Work Programme places a particular emphasis upon a partnership approach using 'prime contractors' from the private sector and voluntary and community sector 'sub contractors'. The Work Programme is designed to be flexible enough to meet the needs of individual claimants and, as a result, contractors have only been required to outline a 'minimum service offer' for supporting jobseekers back to work.

A key element of the Work Programme is the 'payment by results' funding mechanism which uses future benefit savings to fund delivery activity. This means that providers will be paid an initial 'attachment fee' for providing support, followed by a much larger 'job outcome fee' once a jobseeker has been placed into work for either 13 or 26 weeks depending on the client group.

⁸³ HM Government (2011) *Welfare Reform Bill*
<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/policy/welfare-reform/legislation-and-key-documents/welfare-reform-bill-2011>

Additional 'sustainment payments' will also be provided for every four weeks a jobseeker continues to be in employment after the job outcome fee is paid. All fees are paid at different rates depending upon the customer groups with the aim of reflecting those in need of greater support (e.g. supporting an individual currently in receipt of Incapacity Benefit (IB) into employment will receive a greater payment than supporting a JSA claimant). The Work Programme went 'live' in April 2011 with a selection of prime contractors.

5.2 Common impacts

Clearly, many of the proposals identified above are still passing through the legislative process and indeed a number will not come into realisation for a couple of years. There are however a number of emerging impacts from the welfare reform agenda upon equalities issues, equalities groups, and wider social and economic considerations. Indeed, 57% of respondents to our questionnaire felt that the welfare reforms would have some or a significant impact on equality.

5.2.1 Impact 1 – A supply and demand mismatch

Whilst the reforms around welfare are needed and the encouragement of people into work through the Work Programme is positive, the proposals and actual policy delivery activities have failed to deal with a key supply and demand mismatch. Changes to the UK and global economy since the recession of 2008 has seen levels of unemployment and worklessness rise significantly in the UK. This rise means that alongside the existing 3.5 million claimants of work related benefits (JSA, IB, and IS) in 2008, a further 1 million jobseekers have been added to the market through job losses in the public and private sectors; together with a rising number of graduates and young people out of work, education or training. Figure 3 highlights the rise in the proportion of the working age population claiming the key out of work benefits of JSA, IB/ESA and IS. It details the almost doubling of claims of JSA from around 2% to nearly 4% and the continued stagnation of IB and IS.

Figure 3: Proportion of population claiming key out of work benefit⁸⁴

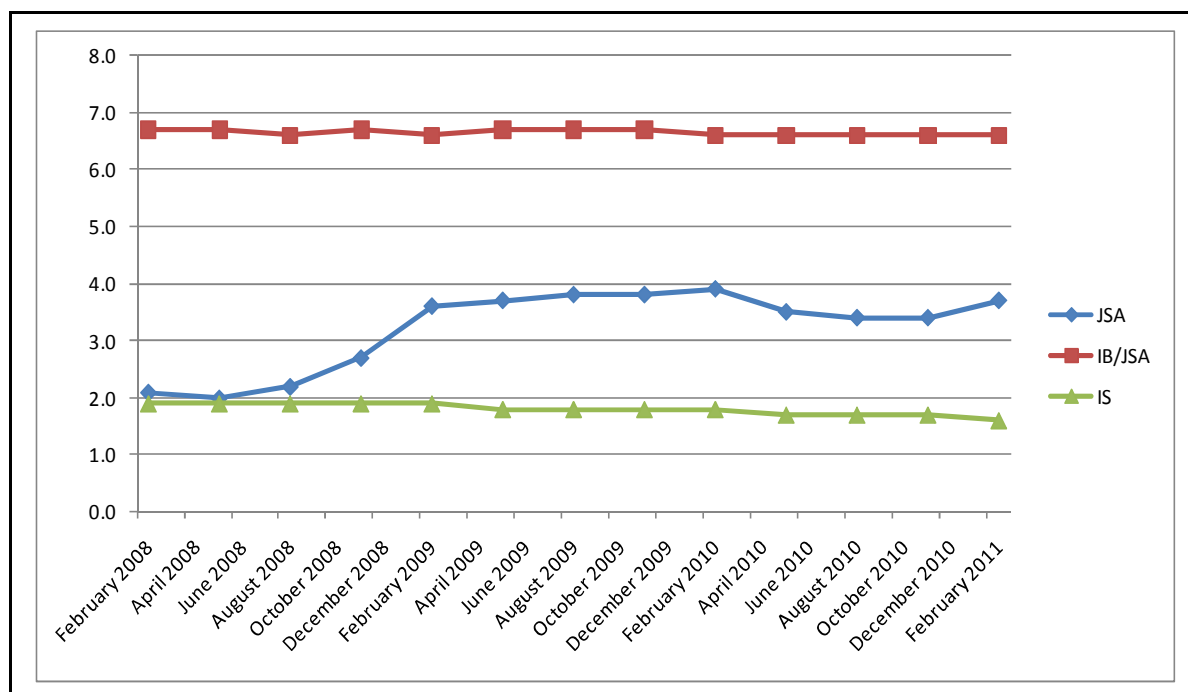
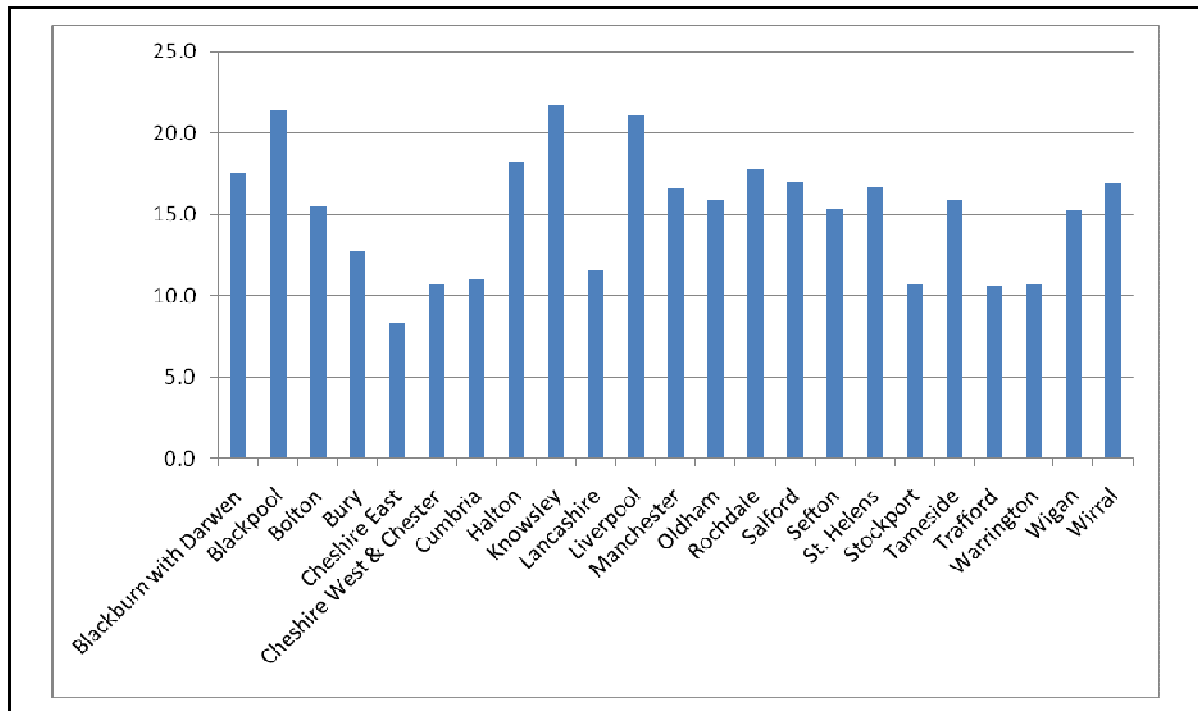


Figure 4 highlights the current levels of worklessness (a catch all term for JSA, IB/ESA, and IS) for February 2011 (the latest available figures) in each of the unitary authorities of the North West. It is clear that there are some local authority areas in the North West where worklessness figures are above 20%, meaning that one in five people of working age claim an out of work benefit. This is particularly evident in Knowsley, Blackpool and Liverpool. There are currently 646,240 claimants of out of work related benefits in the North West. Overall in the UK there are currently 4,620,910 claimants of out of work benefits or 11.8% of the working age population.

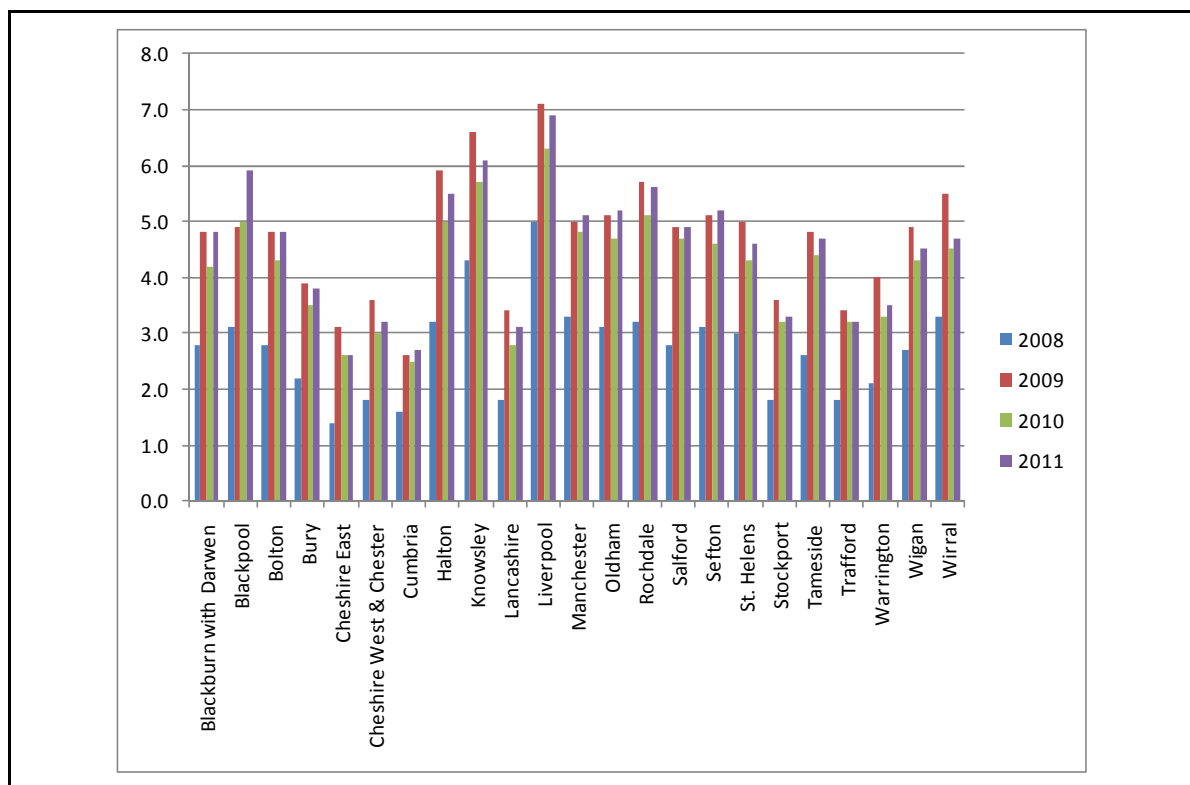
⁸⁴ Source of data: <http://www.nomisweb.co.uk>

Figure 4: Levels of worklessness by North West authority⁸⁵



JSA figures for North West authorities are available for a far more up to date time period, with Figure 5 highlighting trends over the last three years in terms of proportions of the working age population claiming JSA. What we can see is peaks and troughs in claims of JSA, with significant increases in claims in 2009, a slight decrease in 2010, and an increase again in 2011 as a result of cuts in public sector employment.

Figure 5: Change in JSA claims in the North West (July 2008 – July 2011)⁸⁶



⁸⁵ Source of data: <http://www.nomisweb.co.uk>

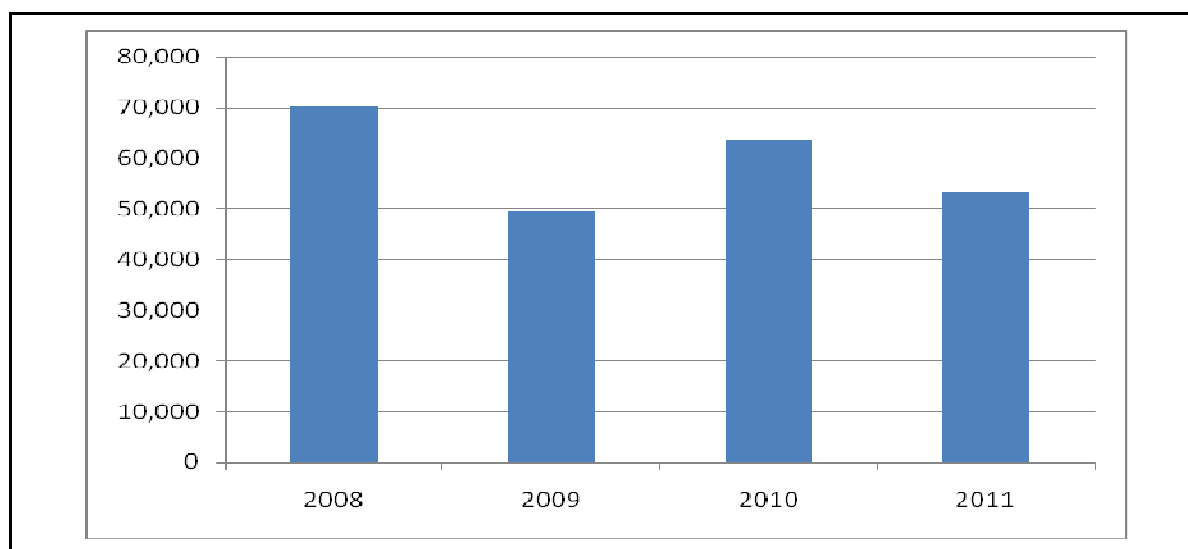
⁸⁶ Source of data: <http://www.nomisweb.co.uk>

This means that there is an increasing supply of labour for employment opportunities and increased levels of benefit claims, thus the need to move people into work is clear. What has not been necessarily fully explored is the demand side when it comes to welfare reform; if we are to have a work focused welfare system then there has to be sufficient job opportunities to fill the market of claimants. Given cuts in public employment and other economic challenges, the demand side is simply not there leaving an over-supply of labour:

*'You bring in welfare reform that assumes there are jobs to go into.'*⁸⁷

A key determinant of demand in the labour market is through statistics around the number of unfilled vacancies advertised through Jobcentre Plus. Figure 6 highlights how this figure has changed in the July of each of the last four years in the North West. It is clear that there are far fewer vacancies in July 2011 than July 2008, with there currently being around 50,000 unfilled vacancies.

Figure 6: Number of Jobcentre unfilled vacancies⁸⁸



This supply and demand mismatch has impacts for different communities, in particular localities with above average levels of worklessness. For some local authority areas, the proportion of the working age population claiming an out of work benefit is approaching 25% therefore creating the job opportunities is a particular problem. This is a particular challenge in the urban areas of the North West where there is significant competition for every opportunity, thus there is a geographical impact:

*'The programme seems to take no account of unemployment levels and the competition for jobs in particular areas.'*⁸⁹

There is also an impact for individuals who have been away from the labour market for a significant period of time. For these individuals, there is a challenge of not only reduced benefit and a greater pressure to move into employment, but also increased competition for opportunities from people who have recently become unemployed and are hence a lot closer to the labour market. There is also a challenge here in the make up of the Work Programme and its payment by results model. Clearly, an economically conscious prime contractor will see it as more advantageous to support those closest to the labour market into employment rather than an individual that has been away from the labour market for ten years and needs significant support; in effect cherry picking people for support:

*'If I was that company, I would be looking at who would be a quick win, and I would pull out the ones I could get into work and the most vulnerable will end up at the back of the queue.'*⁹⁰

⁸⁷ BME focus group participant

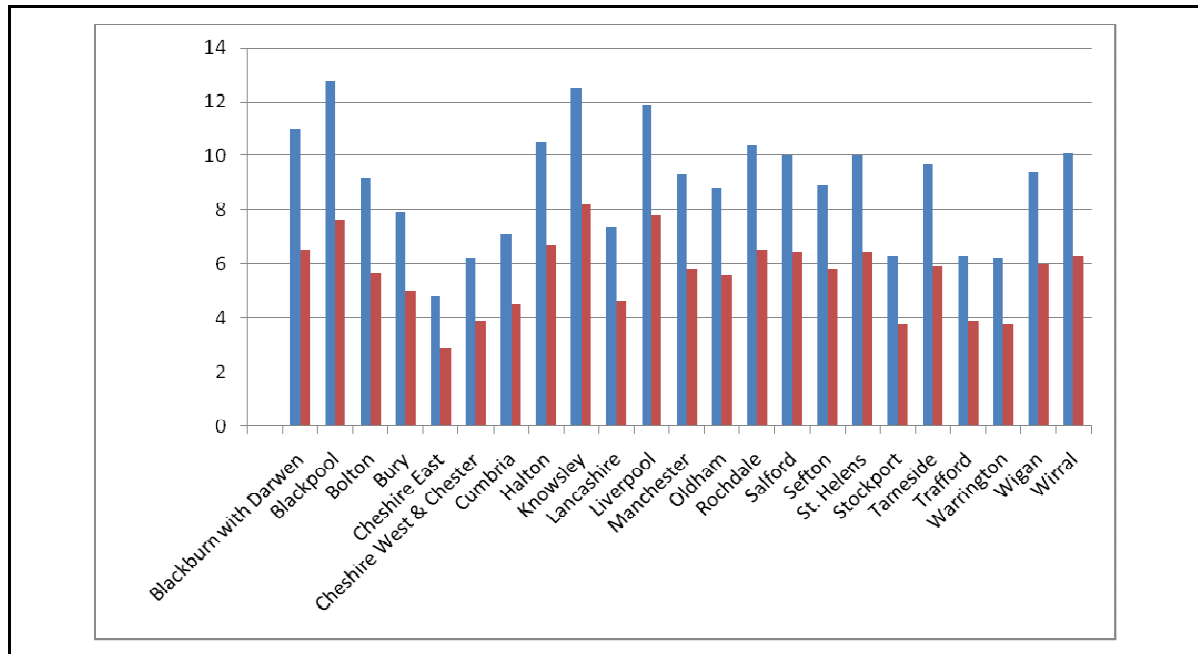
⁸⁸ Source of data: <http://www.nomisweb.co.uk>

⁸⁹ BME focus group participant

⁹⁰ BME focus group participant

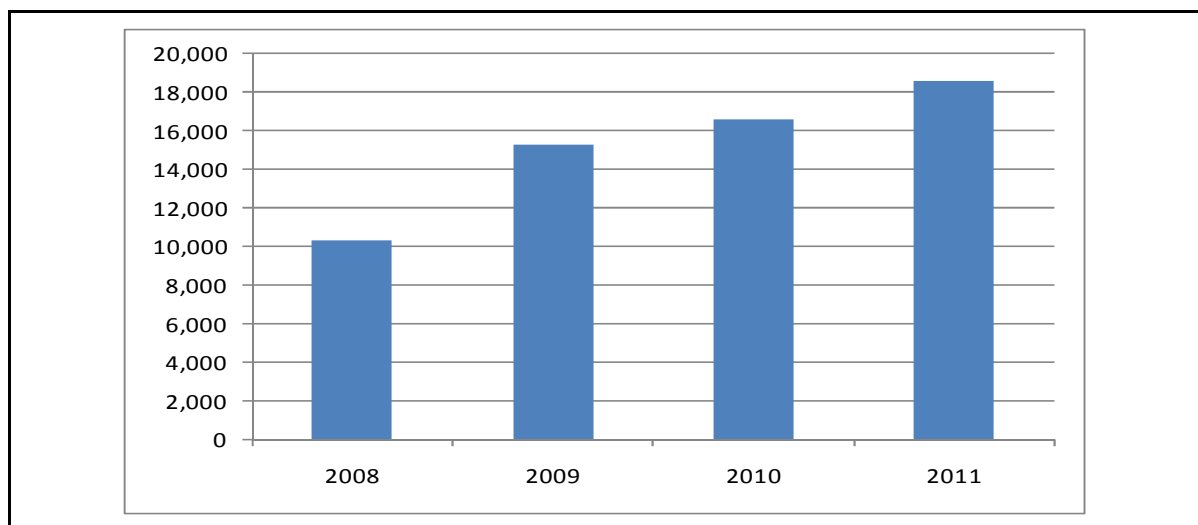
Figure 7 highlights the proportion of people of working age by North West authority claiming IB and additionally the proportion of people of working age claiming IB that have been doing so for over five years. It is clear that in almost all authorities that well over half of IB claimants have been claiming the benefit for over five years. At the UK level some 1.5million people have been claiming IB for over five years.

Figure 7: Claims of Incapacity Benefit by North West local authority by duration of claim



A further group for whom the supply and demand mismatch will have particular implications is those with protected characteristics and who face multiple barriers to the labour market. These include young people with the NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) number having recently gone over the 1 million mark for the first time. 16.2% of all 16-24 year olds were NEET in Quarter 2 of 2011 compared to 14.4% in Quarter 2 of 2010⁹¹. It also includes people from BME communities who face cultural barriers to the labour market and people already living in deprived and impoverished communities. Figure 8 highlights the effective doubling in the number of claimants of JSA from ethnic minority communities between 2008 and 2011 in the North West from 10,000 claimants in July 2008 to nearly 20,000 claimants in July 2011.

Figure 8: JSA increases in ethnic minority communities⁹²



⁹¹ Source of data: http://data.gov.uk/dataset/neet_statistics

⁹² Source of data: <http://www.nomisweb.co.uk>

A further impact of the supply and demand mismatch around welfare reform and the labour market is increased incidences of loss of confidence and mental health issues as a result of being out of the labour market. With a growing number of unemployed across all equalities characteristics, this is a very real potential negative outcome if support and specialist support is not provided to move people back into work. The challenge is particularly high amongst young people:

*'It's not where you start it's where you end up. If you have not got a job after six months you are in a bad place, but after twelve months real mental health issues start to take hold.'*⁹³

A 2010 study undertaken by the Prince's Trust in Wales highlighted the link between worklessness and poor mental health in young people, particularly the correlation between being unemployed and incidences of insomnia, depression and panic attacks. The research⁹⁴ found that 48% of unemployed respondents felt that their lack of job has led to problems like panic attacks, self harm and self loathing.

5.2.2 Impact 2 – Access to specialist employment support services cut

Over the last ten years, and through programmes such as the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, the New Deal and Working Neighbourhoods Fund, grant funding has been available for employment programmes at the local authority and neighbourhood level. This has seen the rise of voluntary and community sector organisations offering specialist and individualised employment support and knowledge. We have seen specialist and bespoke support for BME communities which recognises multiple barriers to employment and that a job is not necessarily the only outcome of an employment programme. We have also seen specific employment support for disabled groups, young people, lesbian, gay and bisexual groups, and the over 50's. What this bespoke support has provided is employment support in an environment in which people are comfortable and not necessarily driven by a culture focused upon outputs.

This focus by equalities focused voluntary and community sectors organisations upon specialist employment activities is reflected in the questionnaire undertaken as part of this research. 50% of organisations stated they had some focus upon education and training activities with 30% suggesting they had some focus upon employment activities and welfare and benefits activities.

The move to a single Work Programme, and wider associated public expenditure and funding cuts, has seen the streamlining and, in many cases, closure of specialist employment support services for communities of interest. This has significant implications:

- ❑ there is the loss of voluntary and community sector organisations which have the specialist knowledge required to support people into employment opportunities;
- ❑ the Work Programme is generic in its offer and largely run by large private sector contractors and some voluntary and community sector sub-contractors. The notion of payment by results means that the risks associated with the Work Programme has prevented specialist employment support organisations from becoming a sub-contractor:

*'This is a results led work programme that won't involve the BME voluntary sector... Few of us are in a position where we can engage in that scenario.'*⁹⁵

The challenge of cuts in specialist services is particularly prevalent in employment services offered to disabled people and funded through local authorities. A poll undertaken in April 2011 by the British Association for Supported Employment (BASE)⁹⁶ suggested that more than half of supported employment providers are facing local authority funding cuts of at least 15%. A quarter of providers stated they were facing local authority cuts of between 50% and 100%, with a prediction being that many of these services would close. These cuts are often being undertaken despite increases in demand for services. The implications of these cuts were felt to be stark with a feeling that the disabled could be left stranded in unemployment because of the cuts to specialist jobs services.

⁹³ Young people focus group participant

⁹⁴ Prince's Trust (2010) *The Prince's Trust Macquerie Youth Index*. http://www.princes-trust.org.uk/pdf/Youth_Index_jan2011.pdf

⁹⁵ BME focus group participant

⁹⁶ Community Care (2011) *Cuts strand disabled people without employment support*

<http://www.communitycare.co.uk/Articles/2011/04/14/116674/cuts-strand-disabled-people-without-employment-support.htm>

There is also a concern over the specialist knowledge and capabilities of prime contractors when it comes to equalities issues. The focus groups raised concerns over whether prime contractors had the skills or indeed specialism to support people with a mental health problem and indeed whether they had any concept of equalities legislation in relation to employment. The issue of equalities considerations amongst Work Programme prime contractors was raised by Age UK in evidence submitted to the House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee. They suggested that there was a key need for full and ongoing equalities monitoring in order to identify any groups for which the Work Programme is not working.

The issue around cuts to specialist support services was particularly felt to be a challenge for people for whom English is not their first language. Cuts in employment programmes and the move to a single Work Programme have also been twinned with cuts to English language courses (ESOL), a particular impact being felt by asylum seekers and refugees. This specialist and individualised focus was also reflected in the questionnaire with 70% of organisations responding suggesting they provided services for individuals and just over 60% providing advice and guidance activities:

*'If English is not your first language and there is no support mechanism then where do you go?'*⁹⁷

There is also a geographical challenge in relation to the Work Programme which links back to the issues discussed in the localism element of this research. Contracts for the Work Programme have been let on a sub-regional basis, with the expectation that local activity will be picked up by the sub-contractors. There will inevitably be gaps in provision, meaning jobseekers will have to travel significant distances to reach support mechanisms. This was simply not the case with previous neighbourhood focused support. Geographical gaps throw up another challenge in the capabilities of prime contractors and sub-contractors to understand the specific needs of communities. This may lead to unsuitable job matches.

The role of Jobcentre Plus and its credibility to understand equalities issues was also a key topic of conversation across each of the focus groups, particularly amongst lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans communities. It was felt that specialist employment support was required from the voluntary and community sector because Jobcentre Plus did not understand the specific issues facing particular groups and where they should be referred to. This has often led to a mistrust of a key employment agency:

*'The jobcentre don't seem to know much about lesbian, gay and bisexual issues.'*⁹⁸

Many communities have become reliant upon specialist support, with cuts meaning they may need to start reusing Jobcentre Plus and other emerging prime contractors through the Work Programme. There is a continued concern that these organisations do not understand equalities issues:

*'The whole thing hasn't been thought through. The pieces don't connect up. It's like the Government wants to punish people for being on benefit. Equalities just won't come into it.'*⁹⁹

5.2.3 Impact 3 – Reduced benefit entitlement for the poorest

The drive towards moving people into employment has significant implications for existing benefit recipients. The Government has proposed and is enacting key changes to IB criteria, cuts to DLA, and changes to tax credit eligibility. This all has implications for the incomes of individuals and particular groups.

The Government is currently rolling out the Work Capability Assessment for claimants of IB. This tests an individual's capability to be working, with the aim of moving people from IB to ESA or JSA. In monetary terms, benefit payments are lower on JSA than IB; and there is equally a requirement to be actively seeking employment. Current weekly benefit payments for JSA (implemented from 12 April 2011) are £53.45 (under 25s) and £67.50 (over 25s)¹⁰⁰. Comparably, the IB weekly payment is £76.45, which is often supplemented by other benefit claims such as Housing Benefit.

⁹⁷ BME focus group participant

⁹⁸ LGB focus group participant

⁹⁹ Women's focus group participant

¹⁰⁰ Information derived from:

http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/MoneyTaxAndBenefits/BenefitsTaxCreditsAndOtherSupport/Employedorlookingforwork/DG_10018757

This shift is particularly challenging for people with mental health issues, who are likely to be 'passed fit' for work through the Work Capability Assessment. Figures released in February 2011 by the DWP suggested that 55% of people undertaking the Work Capability Assessment were fit for work¹⁰¹. For particular groups with protected characteristics mental health issues are a challenge. 2 in 5 lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals have a clinically recognised mental health issue¹⁰². It is challenging because people will be in receipt of less benefit, and as described in impact area 2, the specialist employment support services in the voluntary and community sector have been largely cut. The focus groups undertaken as part of this research suggested that the way in which the benefit changes were being undertaken were brutal with a particular lack of cultural sensitivity of the needs of different groups such as BME communities:

*'There were very serious concerns about the cultural sensitivity of the benefits system and the Work Programme and the lack of advice services.'*¹⁰³

Changes to welfare systems and benefits are notoriously complex and difficult to understand, even for the civil servants responsible for designing and implementing policy. It is therefore integral that benefit changes, such as that to the Universal Credit, are well communicated and that reasoning for changes are understood by the recipients affected. This communication is a significant challenge for communities given cuts to specialist support and advice services. There is a worry that people will not understand the changes and will not know where to turn for advice and support:

*'If you are on benefits you are waiting for that letter to tell you your money has changed, but if you do not understand that letter, you are already in crisis by the time you realise that something has happened to your money.'*¹⁰⁴

Changes to benefits are likely to have a more challenging impact upon specific groups: for BME communities there may well be a challenge around language and culture; for those with low skills there will be a challenge around literacy and understanding changes. All of this points to a need for the advice services and voluntary and community sector organisations which are being eroded away:

*'People are going to be queuing up outside the community centre because there is a financial change to their benefits.'*¹⁰⁵

*'Specialised organisations were providing advice and support that was culturally and language specific but many have been cut.'*¹⁰⁶

This issue of specialist advice is also particularly important in communities where trust and perception is a key factor:

*'We cannot signpost people from the Asian communities to any external groups; they want support from their own community.'*¹⁰⁷

Cuts to DLA were deemed in the focus groups to have key impacts upon the quality of life, incomes and employment opportunities of lesbian, gay and bisexual communities and disabled communities. For lesbian, gay and bisexual communities a specific emerging impact from the cuts to DLA was for people with HIV and the potential impact of losing DLA and moving toward out of work benefits such as JSA:

*'People with HIV can have good and bad days, if they are assessed on a good day they can lose their DLA, and because they have been out of the workplace for a long time they struggle to get back into the workplace.'*¹⁰⁸

¹⁰¹ Source of data: http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/workingage/esa_wca/esa_wca_wca_27042011.pdf

¹⁰² Warner, J. (2004) *Rates and predictors of mental illness in gay men, lesbians and bisexual men and women* <http://bjp.rcpsych.org/content/185/6/479.short>

¹⁰³ BME focus group participant

¹⁰⁴ BME focus group participant

¹⁰⁵ BME focus group participant

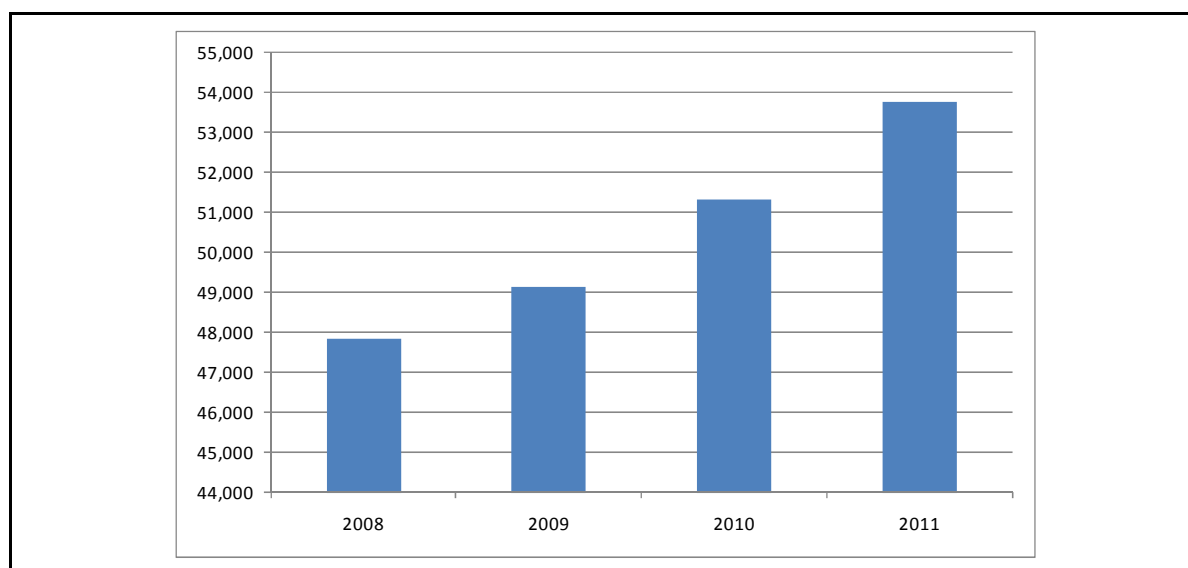
¹⁰⁶ BME focus group participant

¹⁰⁷ BME focus group participant

¹⁰⁸ LGB focus group participant

The number of people claiming DLA in the North West has actually increased over the last four years, as indicated in Figure 9. The number of claims have increased from 47,840 (1.1% of the working age population) in 2008 to 53,780 (1.2% of the working age population) in 2011. This is above the UK average of 1.0% of the working age population.

Figure 9: Increasing number of Disability Living Allowance claimants (2008-2011)¹⁰⁹



The cuts to DLA are of greatest concern to disabled communities. The Government is seeking a 20% reduction in DLA payment, with the focus groups unanimous that the only way that this could be achieved through changing the criteria and cutting benefit for those who are no longer eligible. Cuts to the DLA have significant impact upon the capability of disabled people to work and particularly travel to work:

*'I have a friend concerned that when she is reassessed her mobility component will be reduced and she uses it to get to and from work. If she loses that it can have a huge knock-on effect on her being able to work.'*¹¹⁰

Disabled groups also felt the whole process of reassessment for DLA to be humiliating, with decisions set to significantly disrupt the livelihoods of those who are refused benefit or moved to out of work benefits such as JSA. Cuts to or removal of DLA will have an impact on individual incomes and care provision. Payments of DLA currently range from £19.55 to £73.60 a week for the care support element and from £19.55 to £51.40 for the mobility support element¹¹¹.

Cuts to Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) also threaten the independence of young people, particularly those living in rural areas. EMA has historically been used to finance public transport for young people to and from college. Without it, young people will see a limiting of their options particularly with the associated rise in tuition fees. EMA was worth £560 million a year and provided young people from low income backgrounds with up to £30 a week. Whilst EMA has been replaced with a £180 million a year bursary scheme focused upon young people in care and the severely disabled, there is still a significant cut in finance which affects the ability of young people to progress in education and training. Young people have effectively been delivered a double blow with cuts to key benefits and a lack of demand for their abilities in the labour market:

*'Young people have taken a disproportionate hit. Options are being scaled down and their lifestyles are reduced due to lack of employment opportunities... and support services disappearing.'*¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Source of data: <http://www.nomisweb.co.uk>

¹¹⁰ Disability focus group participant

¹¹¹ Source of information: http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/disabledpeople/financialsupport/dq_10011925

¹¹² Young people focus group participant

Cuts to tax credits are having a real impact on childcare costs and support. From April 2011, 1.8 million tax credit claimants have had their credits removed. The situation is particularly dire for low income families who have had working tax credits cuts. Recent research by Save the Children¹¹³ has highlighted the scale of the challenge when it comes to childcare and moving into employment, particularly for those living in the most deprived communities. The research reveals that families are getting into debt because of the high cost of childcare, with a third turning down jobs and 40% considering leaving work because they cannot afford to pay for someone to look after their children. Of those families in severe poverty, the research revealed that nearly half have cut back on food to afford childcare and 58% have stated that they would be no better off working once childcare was paid for.

This problem is exacerbated by cuts to extended schools provision which provided families with a cheaper alternative to private childcare. Changes to benefits have left families and particularly single parents, in a real paradigm: there is a pressure to work; but also a pressure to pay for childcare independently:

*'The impact on families is huge as there is no longer compulsory after school clubs, and families are cutting down financially and don't know how to cover child care over the holidays.'*¹¹⁴

*'There will be real pressure on single mothers to work at a time when affordable child care is closing down.'*¹¹⁵

5.2.4 Impact 4 – Increase in unfair pressure to work

Across each of the equalities groups, the changes to welfare and benefits systems, and the introduction of the Work Programme mark an increased pressure to move into employment. This was felt to be particularly prevalent for the disabled, older people and women. Access to employment opportunity is particularly challenging for older people who have not yet retired as a result of both perceived and real barriers. There is a real perception that employers are not going to employ older people because of their age:

*'When you are 50 you are classed as an older person. There are no jobs for people to work.'*¹¹⁶

For those older people who have retired the benefit reforms pose an equal challenge, with low pension incomes meaning people having to work beyond retirement age in order to survive.

A further potential outcome from the increased pressure to work is upon family life and quality of life, particularly for single parents:

*'If people are at work and doing funny shifts the likelihood of family breakdown is increased.'*¹¹⁷

5.2.5 Impact 5 – A need for vocational qualifications

The changes to the welfare system and employment support have been twinned with changes to higher education fees and other changes to skills programmes. In order to realise the aspiration to cut benefit dependency and move more people into work, there are key considerations around the qualifications people need to move into employment. In terms of qualifications, it is likely that more vocational type qualifications are required to meet the demands of jobs on offer, meaning training and investment in training. This support is not forthcoming from the Government, whose primary focus is job outputs, thus presenting key challenges for communities. This challenge is particularly prevalent for asylum seekers and refugees around the affordability of new qualifications:

*'Refugees and asylum seekers have qualifications from their own countries, but they can't afford new qualifications.'*¹¹⁸

¹¹³ Source of information: <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/en/Childcare-costs-pushing-kids-into-poverty.htm>

¹¹⁴ Disability focus group participant

¹¹⁵ Women's focus group participant

¹¹⁶ Older people focus group participant

¹¹⁷ Disability focus group participant

¹¹⁸ BME focus group participant

5.2.6 Impact 6 – An increase in harassment and prejudice in-work

The welfare and employment support reforms outlined above are designed to move more people into work. However, there are challenges for particular groups around equalities, harassment and prejudice once in the workplace (e.g. for trans communities there is a renewed pressure as a result of welfare reform to take up employment opportunity, otherwise there is a risk of benefits being withdrawn). However, the workplace is often the area where trans communities have been subject to the greatest levels of abuse, bullying, harassment and prejudice:

'There is a general worry in the community about progression made in terms of legislation and protection now being lost.'

It is likely that more trans communities will become financially and socially vulnerable as a result of being unwilling to take up employment due to harassment and subsequently losing benefit entitlements:

*'Many people in the trans community are not in employment.'*¹¹⁹

Changes to benefits and the move from IB to JSA for people deemed 'fit for work' also has implications for the trans community and equally for other equalities strands particularly the disabled. Under the previous system, claimants were able to start work and if they were unable to cope they could move back to IB with the same level of benefit. With the focus on sustainable employment, if trans communities are unable to cope with the demands of the workplace it is unlikely that they will be able to move back onto IB at all.

Harassment and in-work prejudice were also key themes in the focus group with lesbian, gay and bisexual communities. Unemployment and worklessness is much higher than often anticipated across the lesbian, gay and bisexual community as a result of mental health issues, bullying, harassment and homelessness. As with the trans communities, the pressure presented from the welfare reforms and Work Programme to take up employment may well increase harassment:

*'We are talking about people who are affected by homophobia, then the Work Programme pressurises people into work.'*¹²⁰

A 2011 study from the National Institute of Economic and Social Research¹²¹ outlined the challenge of harassment in the workplace for lesbian, gay and bisexual communities and trans communities. It also sought to identify some of the key barriers for business in creating lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans 'friendly' workplaces.

5.2.7 Impact 7 – The cost of reassessment to the State

The reassessment of the capability of IB claimants to work through the Work Capability Assessment and the changing criteria for DLA is likely to include hundreds of thousands of people. This will come at significant cost to the State in terms of undertaking the assessment, administering benefit changes and, if applicable, providing employment support.

There is also the cost of appeals if individuals are found capable of working but provoke the right to appeal. Indeed, recent evidence from the Work Capability Assessments undertaken in 2011 suggest that 40% of the appeals for being deemed 'fit to work' and therefore ineligible for ESA are successful, with the figure rising to 96% where individuals have had expert representation at their appeals. Thus there is a financial cost to the reassessments. There is also an organisational and social cost in that the very organisations that can provide support to individuals about the process of reassessment are either becoming victims of the cuts or are operating at much reduced capacity:

*'We don't hear about how much it is costing to reassess all these people. To put us through those reassessments is humiliating.'*¹²²

¹¹⁹ Trans focus group participant

¹²⁰ LGB focus group participant

¹²¹ National Institute of Economic and Social Research (2011) *Barriers to employers in developing lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender friendly workplaces*

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/equalities/lgbt-equality-publications/workplace-equality/workplaceequality-fullreport?view=Binary>

¹²² Disability focus group participant

5.3 Exploring the socio-economic implications of emerging welfare policy and equalities impact

The above analysis has drawn out the key common impacts of the welfare reform agenda for equalities issues and equalities groups. In Table 7 we summarise these key equalities impacts alongside each emerging policy development before exploring the wider socio-economic implications of the policy. In Table 8, we then explore the applicability of each common impact by protected characteristic, recognising that some will have different levels of impact for groups. This is evidenced from the extent to which focus group participants felt it was an impact for the protected characteristic which they represented.

Table 7: Common equalities impacts and socio-economic implications of welfare

Policy area	Common equalities impact	Socio-economic implications
The Work Programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of understanding of the demand side needs of groups with protected characteristics. • Cherry picking of groups to support based on closeness to labour market. • Lack of knowledge of prime contractors and Jobcentre Plus of equalities issues. • More difficult to access services as a result of geography of Work Programme. • Increased unfair pressure to work. • Increased harassment and prejudice in the workplace. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased levels of unemployment and worklessness amongst groups with protected statistics. • Increased loss of confidence and mental health issues. • Increased marginalisation due to lack of access. • Reduction in quality of family life and quality of life. • Increased harassment and prejudice in the workplace.
Withdrawal of area based initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cuts and removal of specialist and equalities focused employment support organisations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased marginalisation of groups with protected characteristics and a lack of knowledge of where to go for employment support.
Reduction of benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less income for groups with protected characteristics. • Lack of understanding of what the changes mean and reduced specialist organisations to get advice from. • Reduced capability to work as a result of mobility and childcare challenges. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in poverty and deprivation. • Decrease in the 'local' spending power of communities. • Increased demand for debt and other advice services.
Work Capability Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Humiliation for groups with protected characteristics. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in cost of reassessment and appeals.

Table 8: Applicability of welfare equalities impact by protected characteristic

Policy area	Common equalities impact	BME	Women	Disabled	Older	Young	LGB	Trans
The Work Programme	Lack of understanding of the demand side needs of groups with protected characteristics.	✓		✓		✓		
	Cherry picking of groups to support based on closeness to labour market.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Lack of knowledge of prime contractors and Jobcentre Plus of equalities issues.			✓			✓	✓
	More difficult to access services as a result of geography of Work Programme.			✓		✓		
	Increased in unfair pressure to work	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Increase in harassment and prejudice in work			✓			✓	✓
Withdrawal of area based initiatives	Cuts and removal of specialist and equalities focused employment support organisations.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Reduction of benefits	Less income for groups with protected characteristics.			✓		✓	✓	✓
	Lack of understanding of what the changes mean and reduced specialist organisations to get advice from.	✓						
	Reduced capability to work as a result of mobility and childcare challenges.	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Work Capability Assessment	Humiliation for groups with protected characteristics.			✓				

5.4 The value of equalities focused groups to welfare reform

The above section has explored using evidence derived from focus groups, questionnaires and wider quantitative statistics the impact of the welfare reform agenda upon equalities issues, equalities focused voluntary and community sector groups, and wider socio-economic considerations. In this final element we flip the argument around to argue the need for the consideration of equalities issues and groups in the roll out of the welfare reform agenda (all quotes are from the focus groups and questionnaire):

- ❑ equalities groups provide an understanding of the employment and cultural needs when it comes to employment of groups with protected characteristics:

'The largest group of people not in work who want to work are disabled. Our organisation understands need and provides a key support mechanism.'

- ❑ equalities groups provide an inherent understanding of equalities issues which are valuable to prime contractors;

- ❑ equalities groups provide access to neighbourhood level and specialist employment support activities:

'We are the only organisation in Liverpool providing such services to people with mental health issues.'

- ❑ equalities groups provide advice and support on issues relating to benefit change:

'Equalities groups have long been effective self-organisers, meeting the gaps in mainstream service provision.'

6 IMPACT OF HEALTH

This section of the report explores the impact of the emerging health reforms upon equalities issues, equalities groups, and wider social and economic considerations (please note that since the policy element of this section was written the outcomes to the Government's listening exercise have been announced and there have been subsequent changes to the Health and Social Care Bill). The evidence for each identified impact has been drawn from the focus groups with organisations and individuals representing each of the equalities strands, and a questionnaire issued to equalities focused organisations in the voluntary and community sector. Over half (56%) of respondents to our questionnaire felt that the health reforms would have some or a significant impact on equality.

6.1 Introducing health and social care reform

The Coalition Government has set out plans for a major health and social care reform in the Health and Social Care Bill. These plans will have a significant and far reaching impact on the way in which health and social care is organised and delivered through the NHS and local authorities, and will have an impact on a broad range of partnership agencies. The Bill is still in its parliamentary stages and therefore may undergo some further change; however the fundamental principles are to change structures and devolve powers to GP's and local authorities through new arrangements and boards. The approach follows some of the underlying ideas about localism that are shaping the Government's policy agenda and places GP's at the centre of the commissioning of services. These structural changes are aimed at achieving better health outcomes and a more patient centred service which is clinically led and more focused on prevention and early intervention. The relationship between localism and the democratic structures proposed for the NHS are set out in the consultation paper *'Liberating the NHS: Local democratic legitimacy in health.'*¹²³

6.1.1 Theme 1: Devolving power

The Bill itself changes the role of the Secretary of State (SofS), in relation to the health service in general, from being the provider of services to that of securing their provision through specified bodies (see below). The SofS is given some public health functions in the Bill and there is an express obligation of the need to reduce inequalities between the people of England as to healthcare benefits. The SofS also has a new duty *'to promote autonomy'* – this requires the SofS to leave other bodies that are exercising functions in relation to the health service (including local authorities) free to do so as they think best.

6.1.2 Theme 2: Abolishing existing planning structures

Strategic Health Authorities (SHAs) and PCT's will be abolished, with a new NHS Commissioning Board overseeing the allocation of resources across the new system. Public health and health improvement responsibilities of PCT's will transfer to local authorities and Directors of Public Health will be appointed jointly by local authorities and a new Public Health Service.

6.1.3 Theme 3: GP consortia at centre of commissioning (these are now known as Clinical Commissioning Groups)

The proposals to devolve budgets for primary care commissioning to consortia of GP's represents a significant change for the health and social care landscape. The Government has argued the importance of placing greater power in the hands of GP's to make decisions that meet the needs of their patients. GP consortia which take responsibility for commissioning have a duty to promote equality and work in partnership with local authorities (e.g. in relation to health and adult social care, early years services, public health, safeguarding and the wellbeing of local populations). 80% of NHS services will be commissioned through consortia, handling budgets of £70 billion with the aim of improving coordinated provision for patient needs.

¹²³ Department of Health, *Liberating the NHS: Increasing democratic legitimacy in health*, 22 July 2010
http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Consultations/Liveconsultations/DH_117586

6.1.4 Theme 4: Local authorities to be responsible for public health

Public Health Services will transfer to local authorities by March 2013. The Public Health White Paper outlines the proposals in more detail and sets out provisions for new freedoms and funding for public health in local government, supported by a public health outcomes framework and a health premium to incentivise local government and communities to improve health and reduce inequalities. Data will be published to make it easier for local communities to compare themselves with others across the country. A new public health outcomes framework will sit alongside the NHS and social care outcomes framework.

6.1.5 Theme 5: Governance – Health and Wellbeing Boards

Health and Wellbeing Boards are a key element of the Health and Social Care Bill. Local authorities will have a duty to establish a Health and Wellbeing Board, which are intended to lead on improving the strategic coordination of commissioning across NHS, social care, and related children's and public health services. Part of the key duties for the Health and Wellbeing Board will be to prepare a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for Health and Wellbeing alongside the development of a Health and Wellbeing Strategy for the Borough.

6.1.6 Theme 6: Accountability – Health Watch

Through the Health and Social Care Bill, the Government proposes to create independent Health Watch organisations, which will play a key part in ensuring the involvement of the public, patients, and service users in the development of health services. It is likely that Health Watch will have a formal link with the Care Quality Commission; however this is yet to be clarified.

6.2 Common impacts

Clearly, many of the proposals identified above are still passing through the legislative process and indeed a number will not come into realisation for a couple of years or are falling by the wayside all together. There are however a number of emerging impacts from the health reform agenda upon equalities issues, equalities groups, and wider social and economic considerations.

6.2.1 Impact 1 – Lack of sensitivity to equalities in service planning

The primary area of concern across all the focus groups was a reduced sensitivity to diverse needs within the proposed system. Over recent years, PCT's and SHA's have increasingly recognised their equalities obligations and progress had been made in service delivery. As the PCT's are dissolved, it was felt that the knowledge and experience around equalities would be lost during the restructuring and this would lead to a setback in the development of the processes and structures that would drive equalities in the future:

*'PCT's have done a lot work on equality and this may be lost. The GP knowledge base is limited and they have their own agendas. They have a selective attitude towards patients. GP's will probably reinforce the target driven culture within the NHS.'*¹²⁴

Whilst the roles of the PCT's and SHA's at the regional and sub-regional levels were well recognised in their consideration of equalities issues, the focus group participants were far more scathing of the National Health Service and GP's generally when it came to equalities. There was felt to be a particular problem in ethnicity monitoring, with one participant in the BME focus group stating:

*'The NHS has never got on top of the equalities agenda. Many staff are not asking about patients ethnicity, they are looking at people and guessing.'*¹²⁵

The culture of equalities monitoring was also something which focus group participants felt was deemed to be bureaucratic by health practitioners across the NHS but something which practitioners were slowly getting to grips with. The reforms posed to health policy and delivery activity, particularly new models of delivery, effectively means that a new set of practitioners will need to learn about and embed equalities considerations in their service planning:

*'It is being seen as useless bureaucracy.'*¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Women's focus group participant

¹²⁵ BME focus group participant

¹²⁶ BME focus group participant

*'I think the potential for good practice is there. Even with the previous funding it wasn't good though.'*¹²⁷

6.2.2 Impact 2: GP's lack of understanding and commitment to equalities

The loss of expertise and capacity within the organisational structures of PCT's will be exacerbated by the general knowledge and experience of GP's in dealing with equalities issues, subject to GP led commissioning becoming legislation:

*'There is an enduring problem with the consistency of GP's. Many don't live in the area so don't emphasise with the local people and local issues.'*¹²⁸

This theme of GP's lack of understanding of and commitment to equalities emerged very strongly across all of the focus groups. The women's groups registered a deep mistrust of GP's, in relation to women's health issues and mental health issues. This is also reflected in studies from the World Health Organisation which recognises that gender differences occur, particularly in the rates of common mental disorders – depression, anxiety and somatic complaints. These disorders, in which women predominate, affect approximately 1 in 3 people in the community and constitute a serious public health problem. They go on to argue that despite being common, less than half of those who meet diagnostic criteria for psychological disorders are identified by a doctor.¹²⁹ As already highlighted, mental health issues are also common amongst lesbian, gay and bisexual groups.

The lack of awareness of diverse needs amongst GP's was raised in relation to lesbian, gay and bisexual communities. Stonewall have reported that GP's often see sexual orientation only in terms of sexual diseases and do not recognise the broader health and social care issues. It was felt this weakness would carry through into commissioning. Already, it was felt there was an underestimation of the scale of need in relation to the lesbian, gay and bisexual community. This was also reflected in our focus groups:

*'... Certain people are not allowed to have a sexuality – older people, disabled people, younger people... when we look at GP's surgeries, they don't want a homophobia poster up in case people complain.'*¹³⁰

The real scale of need in relation to lesbian, gay and bisexual communities depends on good statistical information and monitoring however it was felt that the track record of GP's in relation to equalities monitoring for this equalities group and others is weak. This weakness in data collection was a concern raised by the BME focus group who noted the reluctance of GP's to monitor around race and ethnicity:

*'Since 2002 GP's had to collect data. But they haven't been doing it. But then they were given 5p for every time they collect the data even though it is a legal necessity.'*¹³¹

A lack of engagement between GP's and the disability sector was raised as a problem in understanding and awareness. It was felt that the medical model of disability prevailed, in that the social model was not widely recognised. It was felt this would be carried through into the understanding of need and in the commissioning of health and social care:

*'We struggle to get GP's to engage with the disability sector, and the sector is associated with equalities and communities, and isn't that the very thing that GP's are supposed to be interested in? They are running around trying to decide whether to see patients or an accountant.'*¹³²

Whilst there was a protected characteristic element to the equalities understanding and commitment of GP's, there was also felt to be a geographical challenge, particularly in rural areas where access to health and social care is notoriously poor for BME and gypsy and traveller communities. There was felt to be a key need for more cultural awareness and more of a flexible approach to health and social care activities:

¹²⁷ BME focus group participant

¹²⁸ BME focus group participant

¹²⁹ World Health Organisation, Gender and women's mental health http://www.who.int/mental_health/prevention/genderwomen/en/

¹³⁰ LGB focus group participant

¹³¹ BME focus group participant

¹³² Disability focus group participant

*'In Cumbria it would be different, they have a big gypsy community and they have to cut services; there is no advocacy or support so GPs turn them away because they have no permanent address.'*¹³³

This is where specialist equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations were felt to be important in providing that voice for communities of interest. However, the health reforms make no mention of the role of such organisations and, given cuts in public expenditure, the ability of voluntary and community sector organisations to provide such specialist advice is reducing.

The overall picture was one of mistrust in the knowledge and understanding of equalities amongst GP's and the way that this would affect the commissioning process, if it goes ahead. These weaknesses would contribute to deeper health inequalities and poorer services.

6.2.3 Impact 3 – Weakened equalities representation and engagement with new bodies and a lack of accountability

As the new Health and Wellbeing Boards and GP consortia are established, subject to legislation, there seems to be no guarantee that the voluntary and community sector will be represented, as has been the experience in relation to the emergence of Local Enterprise Partnerships in economic development. Indeed, there is a permissive clause that would allow Health and Wellbeing Boards to seek the involvement of voluntary sector representatives but the position is discretionary:

*'We are concerned about governance as we were able to influence the last board. We are concerned that practices understand our needs; we want to work with local consortia. We have more chance at a local level than with the PCT.'*¹³⁴

The involvement of the voluntary sector alongside local authorities and GP consortia has been recognised as vital by the Kings Fund (2011) who argued that such involvement will be necessary to:

'Ensure that disadvantaged or underserved groups are properly catered for.'

The report points out that the:

'Sector has a wealth of information and knowledge that it could contribute to Health and Wellbeing boards to help them tackle health inequalities.'

It further points out the importance that the sector can make to support the commissioning process and advise GP consortia. It was not clear how the changing priorities of the present government would affect the openness of these new organisations to consultation and involvement from the equalities focused voluntary and community sector. It was noted that the local authority's duty to consult was currently under threat as part of the localism agenda and the requirements for involvement under the Equality Act were also being weakened. This had created some apprehension about the influence the sector would have in the future over health, social care and wellbeing agendas:

*'That duty to consult and involve has been weakened and it is going to have a negative effect as a lot of changes were brought about by disabled people being involved... and yet they are talking about localism but we are going to get pushed out. It took a while to get disabled people involved.'*¹³⁵

Accountability (or the lack of) of GP's and other health practitioners to communities was also seen to be one of the key negative impacts of the reforms to health and social care from an equalities perspective. As already stated, accountability through representation and involvement in the process of planning and commissioning is being curtailed. This factor may be very significant at a point where new structures are being established.

¹³³ BME focus group participant

¹³⁴ Disability focus group participant

¹³⁵ Disability focus group participant

The accountability of the new commissioning bodies was of particular concern because of the inexperience of GP's in working on equality issues and in community engagement. This means the identification of need and lobbying role of equalities focused voluntary and community sector groups is reducing, when in fact demand for it is increasing:

*'There is now this assumption that GP's are best placed to make these management decisions around the NHS but I would argue the opposite. They are very vague about patient and community involvement.'*¹³⁶

Under the new system considerable power would be devolved to the commissioning bodies and there was considerable doubt about how these would be held to account, particularly in relation to the Equality Act:

*'What kind of accountability will there be. Will there be GP inspections? Will there be consultation? Will there be a GP's charter? Who will measure outcomes over a larger area? There are issues of long term medication and patient advocacy.'*¹³⁷

Under the legislation, the main body that will have responsibility for holding the new Health and Wellbeing Boards and the Commissioning Bodies to account is Health Watch. At present, a consultation is in progress to determine the structure and organisation of Health Watch. Its role will be to act as a Citizen's Advice Bureau on health with an overriding concern for quality and consumer choice. They will provide a complaints and advocacy service to support choice in health services and will be able to make recommendations to the Care Quality Commission. It is not clear whether Health Watch will have any significant role in relation to equalities in healthcare or any significant influence. At this stage, there seems to be little evidence that a scrutiny role on equalities is being considered for Health Watch:

*'The approach is likely to be one of 'offsetting negative effects' rather than a positive approach to accountability. The NHS is likely to fragment. GP's do have local knowledge but what are their agendas?'*¹³⁸

6.2.4 Impact 4 – Reduced quality and level of service across protected characteristics

The cuts in spending through the NHS and local authorities were having an immediate impact on services in health and social care, particularly those provided through specialist and equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations. Local authority cuts in the care budget will have key implications for equalities groups and organisations, in terms of funding the specialism of services provided:

*'We had to save £91 million and another £50 million this year. It's inevitable that we have to cut services. 40% of the budget is adult social care, 40% is children which includes support of disabled people.'*¹³⁹

The cuts in specialist health services are uneven and the health reforms are having an adverse effect upon particular groups with protected characteristics. Relationships and knowledge between health practitioners and lesbian, gay and bisexual communities, young people, and trans communities were deemed to be particularly tenuous. For the lesbian, gay and bisexual community, there was a perception that health practitioners did not understand their needs and there was a culture of prejudice in the social care sector:

*'As part of a project I did a mystery shop in the care homes in my area and I told them I was an openly gay man. They don't want to know you when they know you are gay.'*¹⁴⁰

Under previous health policy, personalisation was seen as a key driver of delivery, with associated funding for specialist activities and equalities groups. As the importance of the personalisation agenda rescinds and cuts become more integral, so does the consideration of equality in the delivery of activities:

¹³⁶ Disability focus group participant

¹³⁷ Women's focus group participant

¹³⁸ Women's focus group participant

¹³⁹ Disability focus group participant

¹⁴⁰ LGB focus group participant

*'So many organisations have now cut budgets, so they don't see lesbian, gay and bisexual issues as important and cut, so that remit becomes smaller.'*¹⁴¹

The geography of emerging provision and accessibility to services was also seen as a key impact of the emerging health reforms. The impact is particularly severe as specialist equalities provision is cut in some areas; the needs go unmet or they have to travel long distances to reach services:

*'... The local area is not sustainable; all the local stuff has been cut. The Bisexual Mens Condom Project has been cut, but look at how much HIV costs.'*¹⁴²

*'We can't signpost people to any other area except Manchester. Any specialised group has gone on short notice and there is no needs assessment to inform that. The young people have a massive amount of anxiety.'*¹⁴³

This issue of access to health services is a particular issue for older people, the disabled, and those who live in rural areas. Although localism is emphasised through the Health and Social Care Bill, one of the consequences that was discussed in the focus groups was that exercising choice and accessing certain services will involve travelling. These changes may improve the quality of provision for some but also raises issues of access, which may affect older people, disabled people, children and people on low incomes. The focus of concern was particularly in terms of availability of transport:

*'Transport is difficult, if I stay where I live currently, there are no buses so you couldn't get to a hospital, and there is no centralisation of services.'*¹⁴⁴

The general climate of austerity, combined with new arrangements for commissioning, are likely to bring greater pressure on the voluntary and community equalities sector. The King's Fund Report, *'The Voluntary and Community Sector in Health: Implications of the NHS Reforms'* (2011) identifies some of the problems for voluntary and community sector organisations operating in a competitive market. They argue that the new current climate will:

'Leave many voluntary and community organisations vulnerable and create barriers to new entrants.'

Those conditions will make it difficult, especially for specialist organisations working around equalities provision. The challenges in the new system are threefold:

- 1) existing sources of funding from PCT's and local authorities are being cut;
- 2) while voluntary and community sector organisations often bring considerable social value to the health agenda, this may not be recognised in procurement procedures;
- 3) new commissioners will not necessarily be experienced in working with the voluntary and community sector and in equalities work.

There was also a concern that as services for specialist needs are cut, there will be a greater dependency on volunteers and mutual support to deliver health and social care activities. These services could not function in a safe and professional way without support, infrastructure and training and these services would become increasingly important. The danger was that commissioning would not provide this kind of support:

*'Organisations like Home Start, referrals are going up, and where they should be working with social care they don't have the capacity... you are talking about volunteers who have had good training.'*¹⁴⁵

Again, like in the discussion around the big society, equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations play a key role in attracting and training volunteers.

¹⁴¹ LGB focus group participant

¹⁴² LGB focus group participant

¹⁴³ LGB focus group participant

¹⁴⁴ Older people focus group participant

¹⁴⁵ Young people focus group participant

6.3 Exploring the socio-economic implications of emerging health policy and equalities impact

The above analysis has drawn out the key common impacts of the health reform agenda for equalities issues and equalities groups. In Table 9 we summarise these key equalities impacts alongside each emerging policy development before exploring the wider socio-economic implications of the policy. In Table 10 we then explore the applicability of each common impact by protected characteristic, recognising that some will have different levels of impact for groups. This is evidenced from the extent to which focus group participants felt it was an impact for the protected characteristic which they represented.

Table 9: Common equalities impacts and socio-economic implications of health

Policy area	Common equalities impact	Socio-economic implications
Geographical restructuring of health organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of knowledge of equalities issues in the health sector. • Loss of progress on equalities monitoring in the health sector. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased marginalisation in service planning and provision. • A need to start again on equalities monitoring.
GP consortia and commissioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of GP understanding of equalities issues. • Lack of GP engagement with equalities groups. • Loss of voice for voluntary and community sector groups representing communities with protected characteristics. • Cuts and removal of specialist health services. • More difficult to access services and more distance to travel for service users. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased marginalisation of groups with protected characteristics and associated widening of health inequalities. • Reduction of community involvement in decision making. • Reduced specialist services and activities.
Health and Wellbeing Boards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of representation of equalities voice and equalities focused voluntary and community sector on Boards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of accountability of Boards to communities.
Volunteering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of funding to provide training for volunteers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in informal and unsolicited health advice.

Table 10: Applicability of health equalities impact by protected characteristic

Policy area	Common equalities impact	BME	Women	Disabled	Older	Young	LGB	Trans
Geographical restructuring of health organisations	Loss of knowledge of equalities issues in the health sector.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Loss of progress on equalities monitoring in the health sector.	✓					✓	
GP consortia and commissioning	Lack of GP understanding of equalities issues.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Lack of GP engagement with equalities groups.			✓			✓	✓
	Loss of voice for voluntary and community sector groups representing communities with protected characteristics.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Cuts and removal of specialist health services.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	More difficult to access services and more distance to travel for service users.			✓	✓			
Health and Wellbeing Boards	Lack of representation of equalities voice and equalities focused voluntary and community sector on Boards.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Volunteering	Lack of funding to provide training for volunteers.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

6.4 The value of equalities focused groups to health reform

The above section has explored evidence derived from focus groups, questionnaires and wider quantitative statistics the impact of the health reform agenda upon equalities issues, equalities focused voluntary and community sector groups, and wider socio-economic considerations. In this final element we flip the argument around to argue the need for the consideration of equalities issues and groups in the roll out of the health reform agenda (all quotes are from the focus groups and questionnaire):

- ❑ equalities groups provide an understanding of the health needs of groups with protected characteristics;
- ❑ equalities groups provide an inherent understanding of equalities issues which are valuable to health practitioners:

'The sector is associated with equalities and communities, and that is the very knowledge which GP's need.'

- ❑ equalities groups provide a voice for communities in decision making activities around health provision;
- ❑ equalities groups provide access to community level and specialist health activities:

'Over the last five years a lot of people have been 'coming out' and that is due to specialist support and advice.'

7 IMPACT OF ECONOMIC GROWTH

This section of the report explores the impact of the changes to the economic growth agenda upon equalities issues, equalities groups, and wider social and economic considerations. The evidence for each identified impact has been drawn from the focus groups with organisations and individuals representing each of the equalities strands, and a questionnaire issued to equalities focused organisations in the voluntary and community sector. The section concludes with a consideration of the key socio-economic values of embedding equalities issues into the economic growth reform agenda and the socio-economic importance of voluntary and community sector equalities organisations.

7.1 Introduction to economic growth

Since its inception to government in May 2010, the Coalition has reiterated its desire to stimulate economic growth. The rhetoric and reasoning behind this is probably threefold:

- 1) the Government would like to sustain the vast economic growth and power of London and the South East of England;
- 2) the Government would like other regions to perform better when it comes to economic performance, output and productivity. This is particularly important in the North West which is deemed to lag in economic productivity terms;
- 3) the Government would like to use economic growth as a lever to tackle embedded issues around social exclusion, so that further public investment is not required to tackle such issues. This is effectively a return to the trickle-down economics which characterised the Thatcher Government's of the 1980's.

The primary emphasis of the Government's approach to economic growth is through supporting private sector business to develop and grow. The focus is therefore upon putting in place the conditions to enable enterprise to develop and flourish (such as through Enterprise Zones) and in reducing the bureaucracy associated with business development (such as business rates). Equally important for the Coalition Government has been the enhanced role of business in the stewardship and development of localities. Local Enterprise Partnerships have emerged as the key vehicle for facilitating this engagement, often through the auspices of the Chambers of Commerce.

The key policy document supporting the development of the economic growth agenda has been a White Paper '*Local growth, realising every place's potential*' which was launched in autumn 2010. The White Paper set out key policy proposals for Enterprise Zones, Local Enterprise Partnerships, Regional Growth Fund, and new financing powers such as Tax Increment Financing.

Local Enterprise Partnerships

Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) have been negotiated with the Government in 38 localities. These localities are largely sub-regions or city regions with the partnerships bringing together business representative bodies, private sector businesses, local authorities and other public sector economic development representatives. The purpose of the partnerships is to develop strategy that enables their sub-regions to grow and create job opportunities. LEPs do not however have any supporting funding.

Regional Growth Fund

The Regional Growth Fund (RGF) is effectively the replacement finance for that provided through the RDA's, but at a much lower scale. Around £1.4 billion will be issued through the RGF over the next three years to fund innovative projects that exacerbate growth and job creation in localities. Importantly, the funding is allocated through a competitive bidding process meaning some LEP areas will not receive RGF funding.

Enterprise Zones

Enterprise Zones (EZ's) were reintroduced in winter 2011. Closely following a policy prescription from the 1980s, EZ's seek to stimulate business growth, in particular parts of cities or urban areas by cutting business taxes, easing planning restrictions and giving businesses the tools they need to invest and expand. Ten initial EZ's were announced in April, including Airport City in Greater Manchester, with a further 11 announced in August 2011, including the Daresbury Science Park in Warrington.

7.2 Common impacts

Many of the policy areas identified above have been implemented without primary legislation. Whilst the focus groups revealed very few thoughts from voluntary and community sector organisations and communities of interest representatives about the impact of such policy, we think through some generic ones below which we think will impact upon equalities issues, equalities groups, and wider social and economic considerations.

7.2.1 Impact 1 – Lack of voluntary and community sector and equalities representation on emerging structures

The Local Growth White Paper and a host of other governmental policy documents effectively replace the RDA's with sub-regional geographical level Local Enterprise Partnerships. The purpose of these business led partnerships is to drive economic growth through innovative strategy and intervention. The challenge of a business led partnership is that the focus will predominantly be upon economic output, jobs creation and other hard economic outcomes. To date, there has been very little focus in emerging LEP strategies upon issues of social inclusion, deprivation and indeed working within the limits of the environment. This is reflected in the core objectives of the Liverpool LEP, which are:

- accelerating the rate of growth;
- accelerating the rate of improvement in productivity levels;
- rebalancing the economy from the public sector to high value private sector employment.

The lack of consideration of social issues and deprivation are also reflected in the core proposed outcomes of the Liverpool LEP, which are:

- grow existing businesses and their productivity;
- create new businesses;
- attract businesses to the city region;
- change the business environment;
- exploit infrastructure and real estate projects;
- give attention to parts of the economy where there are opportunities for step change;
- create new jobs for appropriately trained residents of the city region.

There has been very little rhetoric or mention in both government policy and emerging LEP strategies as to the role of the voluntary and community sector on LEPs, in terms of both representation and in delivering against key priorities. Looking at the strategic make-up of LEPs to date they are synonymous by the lack of representation from the voluntary and community sector generally and representatives of the protected characteristics, particularly from BME communities, women, and disabled people. This lack of representation has implications for future delivery activities, once these start being channelled through the LEPs:

*'In some areas there is no disability voluntary sector representation... at one stage there was no women either.'*¹⁴⁶

The seventeen strong LEP Board for the Sheffield City Region comprises solely public and private sector representatives, only two of whom are women. The Board for the Cheshire and Warrington LEP is a little more representative, with four of the eleven places taken by women, but still only one representation from the voluntary and community sector.

7.2.2 Impact 2 – Reduced resilience as opposed to increased

Over the last three years, CLES has undertaken a number of pieces of research exploring the resilience of place. In our model, resilience is predicated by effective relationships between the public, commercial and social sectors. In our experience, the most effective responses to policy and community challenges have been where the three sectors work closely to deliver a joined up response. As highlighted in impact 1, the development of LEP structures to date have been characterised by a lack of involvement and representation of the voluntary and community sector and equalities strands.

¹⁴⁶ Disability focus group participant

We would argue that this lack of involvement is of key economic and social detriment to the priorities of LEPs to stimulate growth and jobs. Whilst predominantly focused on issues of social and community development, the voluntary and community sector is a key contributor to local economies in job creation and sustainability terms, and in financial and economic value. A key impact of the isolation of the voluntary and community sector from LEPs is a reduced resilience of place, a reduced ability to respond to key economic, social and environmental shocks, and a removal of the key 'bridge' or link between policy makers and the needs of communities. Evidence from CLES' resilience work across eight local authority areas suggests the relationship between the social and commercial sectors to be the most brittle and in need of improvement.

7.2.3 Impact 3 – A loss of specialist services

The function of economic development and regeneration has been supported over the last twenty years by a series of area based initiatives which have often been funded on the basis of deprivation and key local economic and social challenges. These area based initiatives chronologically include:

- ❑ City Challenge;
- ❑ Single Regeneration Budget;
- ❑ National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (including New Deal for Communities and Neighbourhood Renewal Fund);
- ❑ Working Neighbourhoods Fund.

This source of funding has often been used by the voluntary and community sector as a key source of grant funding to deliver specific and specialist services in neighbourhoods around employment, health, and liveability. Area based initiative funding has also been used to set up networks within the voluntary and community sector, starting with the Community Empowerment Networks, and culminating in equalities focused networks, such as BME networks.

All this area based funding has now come to an end and has been replaced by business and economic growth focused partnerships in the form of LEPs and funding in the form of RGF. This threatens the viability of organisations and activities previously funded through such area based initiatives as they are unlikely to be able to access new finance or be large enough to bid for mainstream services. From an equalities perspective, this will see a reduction in specialist activities and services provided through grant funding for particular communities of interest. Equally, with such a strong focus upon economic growth and job creation, and a lack of voluntary and community sector representation it is unlikely that LEPs will understand and prioritise socially focused activity by the voluntary and community sector.

7.2.4 Impact 4 – An increase in inequality

The rhetoric of the economic growth agenda is based upon the premise of increased productivity and job creation within the private sector. There are a number of key challenges and concerns around this from an equality and indeed inequality perspective:

- ❑ growth is likely to flourish in localities which have already experienced growth; in the North West this includes areas such as City Centre Manchester and Preston. Whilst growth is good in these localities opportunities to take advantage of this growth are not necessarily always available to those living in the most deprived communities, thus exacerbating inequality. The issue of accessibility here is of crucial importance. Connectivity between labour supply and demand in the form of jobs has historically been disjointed. For those living in the most deprived communities, work opportunity has often meant multiple public transport journeys;
- ❑ the introduction of new EZ's does not necessarily address the inequality. In fact, it might actually exacerbate it; EZ's on the whole appear to be at peripheral sites and not readily accessible by public transport for those living in the most deprived communities. Whilst significant focus has been placed on the supply side in creating the conditions for business to flourish at the EZ'S, little attention has been paid to the demand side and particularly up-skilling communities to take advantage of enterprise opportunities whether through realising private business or social enterprise.

7.2.5 Impact 5 – A loss of voice for equalities

The move towards private sector driven partnerships and a focus upon economic growth significantly reduces the voice of the voluntary and community sector and in particular equalities focused organisations to demonstrate the social needs of the communities which they represent. LEPs are likely to be very narrow minded in their approach, focusing upon the twin objectives of growth and job creation as opposed to wider considerations around social concern, social capital, poverty, and deprivation. Without a voluntary and community sector voice on LEPs, communities will be unable to highlight their needs as articulately as previously undertaken through Local Strategic Partnerships and Sustainable Community Strategies.

7.3 Exploring the socio-economic implications of emerging economic growth policy and equalities impact

The above analysis has drawn out the key common impacts of the economic growth reform agenda for equalities issues and equalities groups. In Table 11 we summarise these key equalities impacts alongside each emerging policy development before exploring the wider socio-economic implications of the policy. In Table 12 we then explore the applicability of each common impact by protected characteristic, recognising that some will have different levels of impact for groups. This has largely been drawn from the researchers own thoughts rather than the evidence from the case studies.

Table 11: Common equalities impacts and socio-economic implications of economic growth

Policy area	Common equalities impact	Socio-economic implications
Local Enterprise Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of equalities issues and representation present on LEP boards. • Lack of equalities knowledge on LEP boards and stalled relationships between sectors. • Loss of voice for voluntary and community sector. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lack of social and deprivation considerations in the strategic priorities of LEPs. • Reduced capability of places to respond to economic and social shocks and thus reduced resilience.
Reduction of area based initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced equalities focused and voluntary and community sector partnerships. • Cut and removal of specialist organisations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increases in poverty, deprivation and inequality.
Enterprise Zones	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of access to created job opportunities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased marginalisation of poorly connected communities.

Table 12: Applicability of economic growth equalities impact by protected characteristic

Policy area	Common equalities impact	BME	Women	Disabled	Older	Young	LGB	Trans
Local Enterprise Partnerships	Lack of equalities issues and representation present on LEP boards.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Lack of equalities knowledge on LEP boards and stalled relationships between sectors.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Loss of voice for voluntary and community sector.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Reduction of area based initiatives	Reduced equalities focused and voluntary and community sector partnerships.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Cut and removal of specialist organisations.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Enterprise Zones	Lack of access to created job opportunities.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

7.4 The value of equalities focused groups to economic growth reform

The above section has explored evidence derived from focus groups, questionnaires and wider quantitative statistics, the impact of the economic growth reform agenda upon equalities issues, equalities focused voluntary and community sector groups, and wider socio-economic considerations. In this final element, we flip the argument around to argue the need for the consideration of equalities issues and groups in the roll out of the economic growth reform agenda (all quotes are from the focus groups and questionnaire):

- ❑ equalities groups provide representation for groups with protected characteristics on partnerships and boards;
- ❑ equalities groups provide knowledge and expertise on equalities issues and community needs on partnerships and boards:

'Equalities organisations have increased service provision through the development of partnerships.'

- ❑ equalities groups provide specialist economic development activities to groups with protected characteristics:

'The Government must respect the skills and expertise of the equalities focused voluntary and community sector and realise that it delivers bespoke services that meet very specific needs.'

- ❑ equalities groups provide access to employment opportunities through specialist employment support.

8 AREA CASE STUDIES FROM THE NORTH WEST

The previous section of this report sought to explore the general impacts and implications of emerging notions around localism and big society, and reforms of policy around welfare, health, and economic growth. The analysis was undertaken through the lens of impact upon equalities issues, particularly groups with protected characteristics, the impact upon equalities focused voluntary and community sector groups, and wider social and economic implications. In this section we seek to explore the relevance of these impacts to equalities groups and issues in the North West region through three area based case studies. The evidence has been derived from locality specific focus groups and wider quantitative research. Each case study is structured as follows:

- ❑ about the locality;
- ❑ the size, scale and history of the equalities focused voluntary and community sector;
- ❑ the impact of emerging policy upon equalities, equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations, and social and economic considerations in the locality.

All quotes are from the relevant localities focus group.

8.1 Case Study 1 – Liverpool

8.1.1 Socio-economic profile

Liverpool, as detailed in the most recent Index of Multiple Deprivation, is the most deprived local authority in England, a statistic which has not changed over the last ten years. In socio-economic terms Liverpool faces a host of challenges including:

- ❑ high levels of unemployment (6.9% of the working age population of Liverpool claim JSA compared to the UK rate of 3.9%);
- ❑ high levels of worklessness (21.1% of the working age population of Liverpool claim an out of work benefit compared to the UK rate of 11.9%);
- ❑ Demand for employment opportunity is high with 24 claimants of out-of work benefits for every Jobcentre Plus vacancy;
- ❑ Skills levels are low with 17.2% of the working age population of Liverpool having no qualifications compared to the UK average of 11.3%.

In terms of protected characteristics Liverpool has a diverse population but is characterised by certain demographics:

- ❑ **A young population** – 43.7% of the population are under 24 compared to the UK average of 37.4%;
- ❑ **disabled** – there are 4,020 claimants of DLA in Liverpool accounting for 1.3% of the working age population. This is above the UK rate of 1.0%;
- ❑ **A significant lesbian, gay and bisexual community** – population estimates suggest that the lesbian, gay and bisexual population of Merseyside is approximately 94,000¹⁴⁷;

8.1.2 The equalities focused voluntary and community sector in Liverpool

Based upon the above economic statistics and demographic profile there is a clear demand for the voluntary and community sector. Subsequently, Liverpool has a well established voluntary and community sector and a strong history of community development activity and delivery through organisations and groups:

'It has a long history of voluntary sector providing public sector services so it's a very big and long established voluntary sector. It works – we talk to each other.' (focus group participant)

¹⁴⁷ Source of data: Ecotec (2009) *Improving the Region's knowledge base on LGBT population in the North West* http://www.nwda.co.uk/PDF/Final_Report%20LGBT.pdf

It can be argued that the big society had been in operation in Liverpool long before it became a governmental agenda and the City was selected as a vanguard. The voluntary and community sector infrastructure in Liverpool is largely driven by the Liverpool CVS with a perception that they and other equalities focused groups provide a strong platform for partnership working across the voluntary and community sector. It does not however fit all organisations:

'There are many people that do not fit into the infrastructure.' (focus group participant)

8.1.3 The equalities and socio-economic impact of emerging policy in Liverpool

The impacts of emerging policy already discussed in this report are also evident in the local context in Liverpool:

A reduced leadership for the sector

Infrastructure and sector support funding in particular has been cut. The Liverpool CVS has lost over £1 million in direct funding and have subsequently had to cut over 60% of their jobs, including the entire equalities team.

Reduced specialist services

The cuts have seen a reduction in specialist services for groups with protected characteristics.

'The Children's sector is just haemorrhaging staff. The Childrens Fund was one of the first to go alongside provision for young people' (focus group participant)

The lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans community, a characteristic with historically very few specialist voluntary and community sector organisations and associated services are likely to continue to be poorly represented:

'In some ways LGBT is in the shadow of Manchester... we had Pride... but there are very few funded LGBT organisations in Liverpool, if any, so there is a degree of concealment.' (focus group participant)

Women are also an equalities group where the central government driven cuts and emerging policy were felt to have a disproportionate impact in Liverpool particularly around employment:

'Women have been disproportionately disadvantaged by these cuts. Women have been affected by the high dependency on the public sector, voluntary and community sector and part time working.' (focus group participant)

A negative impact of being a big society 'vanguard'

Liverpool, alongside Eden in Cumbria, was one of two original big society vanguard's in the North West. However, as a result of largely political issues, Liverpool withdrew from vanguard status in 2011. Vanguard status had actually had a perceived negative effect upon voluntary and community sector funding:

'We have a history of big society working, but the money has been withdrawn from the sector since they decided it would be a vanguard area, the things that were working are not now.' (focus group participant)

A reduction in partnership working and grants with the public sector

The reduction in voluntary and community sector infrastructure has had implications for partnership working with the public sector in Liverpool. In particular there have been reduced mechanisms of communicating to the public sector the service and specialist needs of groups with protected characteristics.

A shift from voluntary and community to business

There is increasing pressure through big society and health and welfare agendas for voluntary and community sector organisations to deliver services. Whilst some organisations in Liverpool have been effective in making this shift, the vast majority and particularly equalities focused organisations, lack the capacity, skills and delivery expertise required to do so. For groups previously reliant upon grants there will be an increasing marginalisation and risk to their future and an increased marginalisation of the communities of interest for which they provide specialist activities.

A reduction in equalities importance and knowledge

The cuts in public expenditure have not only had an impact on the delivery activities of equalities focused voluntary and community sector groups in Liverpool, it has also had an impact upon the perceived importance of equalities in public policy and the capacity of the local authority to consider equalities issues.

'This removal of knowledge extends to people making decisions in the local authority too, who care about equality.' (focus group participant)

A double impact for some groups with protected characteristics

Given the levels of deprivation and the earlier challenges identified around employment and health, there is a key multiple equalities issue in Liverpool; young people are particularly likely to be double disadvantaged, meaning a specific need for organisations which offer services across multiple equalities strands:

'Any young people who are double disadvantaged are extremely effected or small communities who are disenfranchised or excluded.' (focus group participant)

A lack of capacity to engage with emerging notions

There was a feeling from the focus group that the emerging notion of localism would have an adverse effect upon those voluntary and community sector organisations which have not historically had the ability or capacity to influence and work in partnership:

'In terms of localism there is a general concern that smaller equalities groups may be excluded and marginalised as the Localism Bill favours those organisations who already understand how to have influence and engage. Smaller organisations may both lack the resources and the confidence to take this approach.' (focus group participant)

8.2 Case Study 2 – Cumbria

8.2.1 Socio-economic profile

Cumbria is an area of contrast with some urban settlements, but a predominantly rural landscape. Cumbria is characterised by rural isolation, an ageing population, a transient workforce, and low paid jobs in the tourism sector. In socio-economic terms Cumbria faces a significant challenge around demand for employment opportunity with 16 claimants of out-of work benefits for every Jobcentre Plus vacancy.

In terms of protected characteristics Cumbria has a growing and increasingly diverse population but is reflected by the following demographics.

- ❑ **An ageing population** – 42.2% of the estimated population of Cumbria is over 50, compared to the UK average of 34.8%.
- ❑ **disabled** – there are 3,290 claimants of DLA in Cumbria accounting for 1.1% of the working age population. This is above the UK rate of 1.0%;

8.2.2 The equalities focused voluntary and community sector in Cumbria

The voluntary and community sector in Cumbria has a key role in the County's economy with size and distribution broadly similar to the national pattern. Cumbria CVS is a key voice in the voluntary and community sector but there are also three equality infrastructure organisations in Cumbria:

- ❑ **AWAZ Cumbria (BME and Race Equality)** – AWAZ seeks to predominantly provide a voice for BME people and groups and influence policy and strategy. It also provides specialist information and advice for BME groups;
- ❑ **Cumbria Disability Network** – the Cumbria Disability Network seeks to influence policy so that service planning meets the needs of disabled people. They also seek to facilitate effective communication through networks;
- ❑ **OutReach Cumbria (LGBT)** – this organisation is seeking to set up groups representing lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans communities.

8.2.3 The equalities and socio-economic impact of emerging policy in Cumbria

The impacts of emerging central government policy already discussed in this report are also evident in the local context in Cumbria:

A lack of recognition of equalities in localism and big society

It was suggested in the focus group that the Government has a picture of equalities as being fully embedded in localism and big society policy and delivery, but that this is not the case in Cumbria, and the equalities sector is much more vulnerable than they recognise. The repercussions of this lack of equalities representation in policy and the associated cuts are likely to be that:

- ❑ seldom heard groups will have even less of a voice in key decisions affecting their community in Cumbria;
- ❑ support for community and community leader roles will no longer be available;
- ❑ the current community contact structures will disappear, leaving Cumbria, as a rural community, in a position where the localism agenda would be very problematic to move forward.

Big society – more questions than answers

Eden in Cumbria is one of the vanguard areas for big society, but this has posed more questions than answers for equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations in Cumbria. Key concerns were raised as to the following in Cumbria:

- ❑ whether communities and representative groups in Cumbria actually wanted to be a part of the big society;
- ❑ whether big society was actually exacerbating unequal relationships between MPs, agencies, local authorities, voluntary and community sector organisations, and communities in Cumbria;
- ❑ whether the drive around community organisers, your square mile, and community planning was fully representative of the community and considered equalities issues;
- ❑ whether the Eden vanguard will work in less affluent areas of Cumbria such as Whitehaven;
- ❑ whether big society is fully joining up with other voluntary and community sector capacity building activities;
- ❑ whether big society was fully engaging all groups with protected characteristics and whether it was recognising the ability of certain groups to participate.

A lack of consultation with the equalities sector over emerging policy

Equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations in Cumbria feel that they have not been invited to be part of any of the emerging initiatives to date, which leaves many feeling alienated from the current government agendas at the local level. Equalities organisations suggested in the focus group that localism discussions neither explicitly include equality, nor exclude it either.

The changing geography of institutions, strategy and delivery

The removal of the regional tier has had specific implications for the voluntary and community sector in Cumbria. The RDA and associated regional strategies presented an opportunity for the sector to have influence at a regional level.

'The demise of the regional structures has meant that the sector can be insular and not necessarily engage across the North West.' (focus group participant)

A difficulty for equalities groups to engage with the LEP

The emerging LEP in Cumbria is heavily dominated by the private and public sectors. Whilst there is representation from the voluntary and community sector in the form of the Cumbria Third Sector Network, the LEP is auspicious by its lack of equalities representation.

'It is so difficult to get your voice heard on the LEP.' (focus group participant)

Emerging policy threatening equalities organisation sustainability

Emerging government policies such as the Work Programme are increasingly moving towards a payment by results mechanism whereby providers only get paid once an outcome is achieved. This is a challenge for employment brokers in Cumbria as rurality is an additional factor and barrier to the

labour market. Policy needs to recognise that addressing challenges around employment takes time in rural areas and is dependent upon a range of factors including consideration of equalities.

8.3 Case Study 3 – Blackburn with Darwen

8.3.1 Socio-economic profile

In socio-economic terms, Blackburn with Darwen faces a number of historic and contemporary challenges including:

- ❑ There is high unemployment with 4.9% of the working age population claiming JSA compared to the UK rate of 3.9%;
- ❑ There are high levels of worklessness with 17.5% of the working age population of Blackburn with Darwen claiming an out of work benefit compared to the UK average of 11.9%;

In terms of protected characteristics Blackburn with Darwen has a very diverse population which is reflected in the following demographics:

- ❑ **A young population** – 43.7% of the population are under 24 compared to the UK average of 37.4%;
- ❑ **High levels of BME unemployment** – 25% of all claimants of JSA in Blackburn with Darwen are from an ethnic minority. This is significantly higher than the UK average of 15.6%;
- ❑ **disabled** – there are 1,490 claimants of DLA in Blackburn with Darwen accounting for 1.7% of the working age population. This is above the UK rate of 1.0%.

8.3.2 The equalities focused voluntary and community sector in Blackburn with Darwen

Within Blackburn with Darwen the equalities focused voluntary sector has grown to support and advise across the protected characteristics. Blackburn with Darwen CVS has historically provided an overarching voice for the sector with a number of specific and focused equalities groups providing delivery and strategic activities:

- ❑ The Blackburn and District Women's Centre provides support for women offenders and a range of counselling and support;
- ❑ Age Concern Blackburn provide a number of services for older people and facilitate the Blackburn with Darwen Older People's forum;
- ❑ Care Network supports vulnerable people to live independently by providing access to affordable, quality assured, day-to-day services;
- ❑ There are some faith organisations in Blackburn with Darwen such as the Blackburn Hindu Centre, and the Lancashire Council of Mosques. The Blackburn Racial Equality Council (REC) has services provided by Preston REC.

8.3.3 The equalities and socio-economic impact of emerging policy in Blackburn with Darwen

Despite Blackburn with Darwen Council's proactive approach to impact assessment, monitoring and community consultation, the pace and severity of the Government's cuts agenda in Blackburn with Darwen has resulted in some impacts to characteristic groups due to the Council's requirement to protect statutory services. It is important to note that these are not all negative impacts and the Council is working hard alongside voluntary and community sector partners to mitigate the impacts of change.

Some cuts to equalities focused organisations

The discussions at the focus group suggested that each of the organisations described above have seen funding levels reduced as a result of the Government's austerity measures. The immediate impact is the loss of services that will impact most heavily on disadvantaged people. Representatives of equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations highlighted that the current impact of service loss and change is most evident for older and disabled people.

Moving the management of resources and services to the community

There is an increasing trend where services including community centres in largely deprived neighbourhoods are being transferred for management by community-led organisations. As services are cut, then responsibility for those who can no longer access those services is being transferred to civil society organisations, families, neighbours and communities. This is supporting the sustainability of vital community services in Blackburn with Darwen.

A growing relationship between the Council and voluntary and community sector

Blackburn with Darwen Council has been active in supporting voluntary and community sector adaptation to the changes which are and which will follow from the changes in policy and funding imposed by the Coalition. The Council and CVS have coordinated two 'set piece' consultations with the Community Network to discuss the potential impact, in addition to a specific Scrutiny (Policy and Review Committee) public debate and the generic budget cuts debate for all members of the public.

The Council is both a Community Budget and 'Local Integrated Services' pilot area, through which it is developing its commitment to new ways of working. The Council's new ward-based engagement model and a range of examples around locally integrated services (e.g. shared neighbourhood teams and developments around community-orientated primary care) demonstrate their commitment to localism and supporting the voluntary and community sector.

A continued commitment to tackling inequality

Blackburn with Darwen has been able to sustain and indeed grow their Equality and Diversity Group on the Local Strategic Partnership. The Group seeks commitment from LSP organisations to help tackle inequality and is represented by groups from across the protected characteristics. A number of representative groups have recently been asked to join the Group including Youth Action and Lancashire Council of Mosques.

9 CONCLUSION AND WAYS FORWARD

9.1 A recap on the report approach and content

The study set out to examine the equalities impact of a number of inter-related policies introduced by the Coalition Government. These policies have been examined together as a package because they constitute a major restructuring of the Welfare State, and of the relationships between the State and society. In carrying out the policy research phase of the study, it was clear that at a government level, these policies were strategically inter-related around three primary aims:

- 1) **localism** – a shift away from centralised control in the management of public services towards new patterns of localised management;
- 2) **the big society** – moving the responsibility for public services away from government, placing greater emphasis on ‘civil society’ organisations for the development and delivery of services to meet local needs;
- 3) **individual responsibility** – a redefinition of the social contract around rights and responsibilities of citizens, placing greater emphasis on responsibilities through workfare and volunteering.

These themes are present within the five policy areas that have been examined (localism, big society, welfare, health and economic growth), and the actions described within the policies work together in achieving these aims. It was right therefore to consider the policies together in order to understand their broader impact.

The object of our research was to examine the equalities impact of these policies, and the initial policy review that was undertaken explored the potential impact of these policies for equalities issues and equalities focused voluntary and community sector groups. The results of the review were presented in Section 2 of the report and formed the basis and lines of enquiry for the further research conducted through focus groups and a web-based questionnaire.

Alongside the policy review, we undertook a review of the equality impact assessments undertaken by the government departments responsible for each of the policies that we have considered. The equality impact assessments differed in style and content across the government departments, with some detailed analysis of impact being offered by the Department of Health in relation to the Health and Social Care Bill and by the Department for Work and Pensions. The analysis was however much weaker in relation to localism and the local growth agenda and we were unable to locate an equality impact assessment through the Office of Civil Society in relation to the big society.

Following the research carried out in this study, we consider that the equality impact assessments undertaken by government departments fall short in their analysis of projected risks in relation to equality. The weaknesses within these impact assessments mean that the scale and nature of the negative impact on equality has not been sufficiently addressed and therefore the measure to mitigate impact is insufficient. Moreover, the impact assessments that have been undertaken do not take into account the relationship between policy areas and their combined effect. Again, we consider this to be a weakness in the approach to impact assessment that underestimates potential impact. A final weakness that we identified through the review was the lack of consultation that was undertaken in relation to each of the policies with stakeholders representing the protected characteristics.

The primary research work undertaken through the study is largely based on consultation. Through focus groups and the questionnaire survey, combined with some socio-economic analysis, the study explores the emerging impact of the five policy areas upon equalities issues, equalities focused voluntary and community sector groups, and wider social and economic considerations. These are set out in detail through Sections 3-7 and the results demonstrate a picture of impact which is wider in scope and scale than the impacts suggested by the Government’s own impact assessments. Although there are some potential positive impacts that are identified, overwhelmingly the story is one of negative equality impact, and a number of these negative impacts are mutually reinforced through the combined effect of the policy agenda.

9.2 Summarising the equalities impacts

Whilst each of the equalities impacts and wider social and economic implications for each of the five policy areas are detailed in tables in Sections 3 to 7, it is useful to summarise common impacts across the policy areas and their applicability to each policy area. Table 13 details the key equality impacts and the areas of policy to which those themes are relevant.

Table 13: Equality impact of emerging policy

Equality impact	Localism	Big Society	Welfare	Health	Economic Growth
More difficult to access services and more distance to travel	✓		✓	✓	
Cuts in funding and reduction of specialist services	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Loss of networks and partnerships for equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations	✓	✓			✓
Fewer reporting mechanisms and support for hate crime	✓				
Reduced understanding of community need	✓		✓		
Loss of equalities voice in public services	✓	✓		✓	✓
Difficulty to engage in service delivery due to equalities organisation size and capacity	✓				
Marginalisation of communities with protected characteristics	✓				
Reduced ability to lobby and advocate	✓	✓			
Lack of understanding of what policy means	✓		✓		
Growth in demand to provide volunteer placement but a lack of funding to provide training		✓		✓	
Loss of equalities knowledge and specialism		✓	✓	✓	✓
Increased unfair pressure to work			✓		
Increased harassment and prejudice			✓		
Reduced income for groups with protected characteristics			✓		
Humiliation for groups with protected characteristics			✓		
Loss of equalities monitoring mechanisms				✓	
Lack of understanding of equalities issues				✓	
Lack of equalities representation on Boards				✓	✓
Lack of access to opportunities					✓

9.3 Discussing the equalities impact

Looking across the policy areas, there are a number of key themes that emerge in relation to equalities impact that need to be considered in the future roll out of the five identified policy areas.

9.3.1 New forms of representation are weak and excluding groups

The question of representation for equalities interest and groups within the new structures developing under localism were seen of paramount importance. Engagement of equalities issues and groups in the governance of bodies such as LEPs, GP consortia and in the structures of welfare reform was seen as important in delivering the accountability and transparency that the Government is increasingly supporting. Involvement in these structures is essential in understanding equality impact and the barriers that exist in achieving positive equalities outcomes.

Localism places emphasis on community; there was a very real concern that this emphasis on geographic community will lead to a weakening of involvement for protected characteristic interests, such as for BME, disabled, and lesbian, gay and bisexual groups. The reasons given for this were a perceived growth in the threats from discrimination and harassment; and additional levels of inequality and representation. It is clear that for equalities to flourish through these new community structures there must be organisations that can support and empower individuals to participate.

Involvement and engagement are important in governance to secure scrutiny and accountability; however there are also benefits of involvement in the processes for implementation. Greater consideration needs to be given as to how people with protected characteristics can be involved in the implementation of programmes and the design of services so that they are more effective and responsive to needs; an approach which is being piloted through community budgeting. This should be seen as essential both for the effectiveness of localism and the big society, and associated policy such as neighbourhood planning.

In the three case study areas and North West as a whole, there is a higher than average dependency on public services and benefits. The austerity measures introduced by the Government will therefore affect the local and regional economy disproportionately. It is likely that the adverse effects of low growth and unemployment will place a heavy emphasis on the voluntary and community sector in creating jobs, volunteering opportunities and routes into work. The coordination of activity between the voluntary and private sector will be increasingly important and will have an influence on how opportunities in the labour market translate into equal opportunity.

The impact of the local growth agenda was the least understood of the policy areas; the main focus for discussion on economic development was in relation to the lack of equalities representation on Local Enterprise Partnerships. The importance of equalities representation within Chambers of Commerce and employer forums will be increasingly important if the labour market is to be open to people with protected characteristics.

9.3.2 Cuts are damaging voluntary sector capability to deliver big society

The Government have placed great importance on the big society and its contribution to changing the relationship between the State, the individual and society. Evidence suggests that the austerity measures that have been introduced, and the way that these are feeding out through local government and the NHS, are having the opposite effect and leading to closure and reduction in capacity within the voluntary and community sector. The focus groups and questionnaire showed these negative effects are being felt across the sector and that these changes are having a negative impact on equalities, in terms of the ability to provide specialist support and capacity building.

The questionnaire that we conducted was not constructed as a scientifically sampled one, but the indicators nonetheless point to an impact in which the capacity of the sector to respond and engage with the big society is being eroded. The effects that we see in the questionnaire are those that have been described by existing organisations, but during the consultation period the reports from CVS's and other organisations suggested that many smaller and equalities focused organisations had already closed.

While the Government has put in place some measures to ameliorate the effects of income lost to the sector through initiatives such as the Big Society Bank and loans, the evidence suggests that small and medium sized organisations in the North West are not sufficiently prepared to benefit from the competitive environment, particularly around contracts. There is therefore a great danger that existing capacity to support the big society and the growth of volunteering will be lost. Larger voluntary and community sector organisations may benefit but the sector may be transformed in a way that fails to meet the big society vision.

9.3.3 Welfare reform is having a negative impact on equalities groups

Across the whole of the policy agenda there was a sense that benefits and services were being reduced in key areas that affect people with protected characteristics. In the focus groups, disabled people and women identified themselves as being in the frontline for benefit reform and reductions in services. BME, lesbian, gay and bisexual, and trans groups were concerned that specialist services which supported their effective citizenship through advice, information, training and access to the labour market would be lost or reduced. Overall, there was a sense that particular classes of people defined by protected characteristics were experiencing unfairness because the new policy framework was liable to reinstate patterns of exclusion and discrimination that successive equalities legislation had been attempting to overcome in the past decade.

9.3.4 The implementation of government policy is disproportionately harming the most excluded

Throughout the focus groups and three area based case studies, there was recognition that social and economic deprivation was aggravating barriers to engaging in the five identified policy areas. Although the socio-economic duty was dropped from the Equality Act 2010, economic and social deprivation is a barrier to equalities, and its effects intersect with other barriers to equality experienced by all groups with protected characteristics. For disabled groups, women and for some BME communities, low income and poverty were important factors in defining their relationship with public services and their opportunities in the labour market.

Economic deprivation was also an important factor in the lesbian, gay and bisexual community, a factor that often went unrecognised because of the assumptions made about the wealthy lesbian, gay and bisexual community. While the socio-economic duty has been taken out of the legislative framework, it is clearly an important aspect in equalities and needs to be understood as a significant contributory factor in producing inequality across the protected characteristics. Rather than tackling poverty, deprivation and inequality, we would argue, based on the evidence of this research, that emerging policy is exacerbating equalities issues and in fact deepening inequality.

9.3.5 A real threat to the equalities voluntary and community sector

There are a wide range of organisations that contribute to equalities, some providing specialist services for particular groups within a local area, some providing a regional service supporting local needs, and some providing a general commitment to equalities across a wider service. Because of the nature of these services and the communities that they serve, many of these organisations have operated through grants or exist as mutuals or through volunteering. These specialist services have been particularly vulnerable to cuts in small grants and are more likely to need the support of infrastructure bodies to support their continued survival.

The evidence from the focus groups show that these organisations are coming under increased pressure as demand for their services increase. This pressure on organisations was particularly expressed through disability organisations, lesbian, gay and bisexual organisations, BME organisations, and organisations such as Citizens Advice that provide services across the protected characteristics. This pressure highlights the need for strong infrastructure organisations that can provide support and grouped services (such as office services). At one level, it becomes clear that the health of this sector will be severely undermined by the loss of infrastructure organisations. Beyond this, there is a very real and growing deficit in the capacity of organisations to properly participate in the new governance structures and hold bodies to account. If equalities are to be effectively supported within these structures, funding mechanisms to support this sector will need to be addressed.

9.4 The shift towards open public services

The equalities impacts described above have been applied to the policy notions of big society and localism, and the associated reforms around welfare, health and economic growth. Since the fieldwork was undertaken, the Open Public Service White Paper has proposed five principles that cut across the service delivery agenda. The five principles are choice, decentralisation, diversity, fairness and accountability. These principles begin the conversation about developing a framework for coherent reform.

Based upon the key findings outlined above, we would argue that the Government needs to consider the following core questions to explore how equality could play a radical role in social change:

- ❑ **Choice** – ‘where possible we will increase choice’
 - How can we have choice over services when specialist equalities focused services are being removed and people have to travel further distances to access services? How can we truly have choice driven change without an understanding of the diversity of need?
 - Who monitors and provides the evidence of service need for groups with protected characteristics?
- ❑ **Decentralisation** – ‘power should be decentralised to the lowest appropriate level’
 - How can decentralisation be achieved without intermediaries and voluntary and community sector infrastructure to provide support and advice?
 - What happens to the array of equalities knowledge and legislative process which has been developed over the last ten years? Will this feed into new provision?
- ❑ **Diversity** – ‘public services should be open to a range of providers’
 - What happens to the equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations who do not have the capacity, skills, knowledge or experience to bid for and deliver public services?
- ❑ **Fairness** – ‘we will ensure fair access to public services’
 - What happens in those localities and communities where the cuts in public expenditure are having a disproportionate impact on economic and social inequality?
 - How is the voice of the most marginalised heard in service decision making and delivery?
- ❑ **Accountability** – ‘public services should be accountable to users and taxpayers’
 - Who provides a voice, network and lobbying role for equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations and groups with protected characteristics?

9.5 The need for a new framework to support social justice within localism

The conclusions developed here concentrate on common themes that have been identified across all the protected characteristics and across the policy areas. In addition, there are specific impacts that affect each of the characteristic groups and these are illustrated in the main body of the report. We have concentrated on common themes in order to identify patterns of equalities impact that may have significance across the whole notion of localism and big society, and the reforms of policy around welfare, health and economic growth. The research illustrates a wide range of negative impacts in relation to different policies and protected characteristics. In the context of this report, they illustrate the importance of detailed consultation and engagement with people and organisations associated with protected characteristics in developing policy and in mitigating or alleviating the negative impact on equalities. These general conclusions are important in the delivery of equalities and fairness in current policy; however we would emphasise the importance of looking at the detail of the impacts in each policy area and for each of the protected characteristics, in order to understand the necessity of consultation and involvement as a way forward in policy development and implementation.

Throughout the conclusions described above, three key themes have been emerging:

- 1) the measurement of impact and the lack of consideration of equalities in emerging policy agendas. There is a clear need for robust systems to be in place that can measure and monitor equalities impact, given that this is a very broad agenda for social change as policy rolls out;

- 2) representation, accountability and involvement is crucial;
- 3) policy change is having a significant and unequal impact on service provision and inclusion, and this must be redressed.

These three themes raise the question of how equalities will be assured within a new system of governance and within a society increasingly driven by markets, whether those be the conventional private sector market or a social market driven through the big society. The current government has rejected centralised target driven approaches for measurement and governance; a new approach is now required based on evidence and accountability at the local level. For this to be achieved, a new framework for social justice is required to ensure that equalities and groups with protected characteristics are a central part of localism and the big society.

This focus upon the need for a new framework to support social justice within emerging policy frames our key ways forward from this research, with thoughts on the development of a social justice framework detailed in a further paper. As such, the ways forward are related to the Government and are entwined to the principles of the Open Public Services White Paper.

9.5.1 Ways forward

- ❑ The Government must recognise that a social justice framework needs to be developed that ensures public services are **accountable** to all users and taxpayers.
- ❑ The Government must develop a more joined up approach to understanding and addressing the impact on equalities groups across all policy areas and government departments to ensure **fairness** in provision.
- ❑ The Government must undertake an urgent review of the role of equalities groups in the public service agenda to enable true **decentralisation**.
- ❑ The Government must consider how they can involve equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations in the process of **diversifying** service provision.
- ❑ The Government must adopt a more consultative approach to service provision which builds in the consideration of people with protected characteristics to ensure everyone has access to the best **choice** of services for them.

APPENDIX 1

The protected characteristics

THE PROTECTED CHARACTERISTICS

The Equality Act 2010 came into force on 1 October 2010. The Act covers nine protected characteristics on the grounds upon which discrimination is unlawful:

- 1) **age** – referring to a person belonging to a particular age (e.g. 32 year olds) or range of ages (e.g. 18-30 year olds);
- 2) **disability** – a person has a disability if s/he has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long term adverse effect on that person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities;
- 3) **gender reassignment** – the process of transitioning from one gender to another;
- 4) **marriage and civil partnership** – marriage is defined as a 'union between a man and a woman'. Same sex couples can have their relationships legally recognised as 'civil partnerships'. Civil partners must be treated the same as married couples on a wide range of legal matters;
- 5) **pregnancy and maternity** – pregnancy is the condition of being pregnant or expecting a baby. Maternity refers to the period after the birth, and is linked to maternity leave in the employment context. In the non-work context, protection against maternity discrimination is for 26 weeks after giving birth, and this includes treating a woman unfavourably because she is breastfeeding;
- 6) **race** – refers to a group of people defined by their race, colour, nationality (including citizenship), ethnic or national origins;
- 7) **religion or belief** – religion is a set of principles concerning the cause, nature and purpose of the universe; however belief includes religious and philosophical beliefs, including lack of belief (e.g. Atheism). Generally, a belief should affect your life choices or the way you live for it to be included in the definition;
- 8) **sex** – a reference to a man or to a woman;
- 9) **sexual orientation** – whether a person's sexual attraction is towards their own sex, the opposite sex or to both sexes.

APPENDIX 2

Historical equalities policy context

THEORISING THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR

The 'voluntary and community sector' is wide ranging in terms of its scale of delivery, expertise, knowledge and capacity. The term encompasses a host of organisations: from small scale community groups to charities operating at a national level. Before drilling down to centre on equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations in particular, we:

- define the voluntary and community sector;
- explore the social and economic role of the voluntary and community sector;
- examine the changing relationship between the voluntary and community sector and the State.

Defining the voluntary and community sector

Pinning down what organisations and activities are captured by the term 'voluntary and community sector' is not straightforward and is indeed something which has been historically debated and has never really been understood by central government. The sector is not rigidly defined; rather it is a 'loose and baggy'¹⁴⁸ sector which many different types of organisations identify as being part of. For the Home Office¹⁴⁹ the voluntary and community sector is defined as:

'Registered charities, as well as non-charitable, non-profit organisations, associations and self-help groups, and community groups. Must involve some aspect of voluntary activity, though many are also professional organisations with paid staff, some of which are of considerable size. Community organisations tend to be focused on particular localities or groups within the community; many are dependent entirely or almost entirely on voluntary activity.'

The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO)¹⁵⁰ identifies the following distinctive characteristics of the voluntary and community sector:

- Self-governing organisations, some being registered charities, some incorporated non-profit organisations and some outside both these classifications.
- Great range of size and structure of organisations.
- Work delivered for the public benefit, beyond the membership of individual voluntary and community organisations (VCOs).
- Independence of both formal structures of government and the profit sector.
- An important reliance on volunteers to carry out its work.

This work includes:

- delivering services;
- advocating and or lobbying on behalf of community causes;
- facilitating international, community and economic development;
- advancing religious faith and practice;
- raising funds;
- providing financial support to other VCOs.

¹⁴⁸ Kendall, J. and Knapp, M. (1995) *A loose and baggy monster: boundaries, definitions and typologies*. In Smith, J.D. (eds) *An introduction to the voluntary sector*

¹⁴⁹ Cited by Voluntary and Community Action for London <http://www.lvsc.org.uk/Templates/information.asp?NodeID=90415&i1PNID=90015>

¹⁵⁰ <http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/>

Finally, for Voluntary Sector North West¹⁵¹ voluntary and community sector organisations:

Fall into one of the following categories:

- a registered charity (including a regional branch of a national charity);
- an Industrial and Provident Society recognised as an exempt charity;
- an unregistered body which falls within relevant eligibility tests;
- is formally constituted as an autonomous, democratic organisation independent of national and/or local government.

The focus of this research is on specialist equalities voluntary and community sector organisations; therefore drawing on these existing definitions, we define specialist equalities voluntary and community sector organisations as:

Organisations that do not fall under the umbrella of government, public sector or private business. The sector includes not-for-profit groups such as charities, community groups and also trading organisations such as companies limited by guarantee, social enterprises and cooperatives that are set up with the explicit aim to tackle social or environmental need. The work of voluntary and community sector organisations is supported by volunteers to a varying degree, and they are sometimes – but not always – led by the communities (either geographically, or in terms of communities of interest) that they serve. Specialist equalities voluntary and community sector organisations have the explicit aim of meeting the needs of, and lobbying for, targeted communities of interest that associate with a shared identity based on:

- faith;
- race;
- gender;
- age;
- disability;
- sexuality.

Voluntary and community sector equalities organisations may also serve communities of interest that are formed around individuals' status as:

- gypsies or travellers;
- refugees or asylum seekers.

Drivers of change in the voluntary and community sector in the last decade

The last decade has been one of significant change for the voluntary and community sector. This change has been driven by the following factors.

The need and expectation for the public sector to engage with the sector

Under the previous Labour Government's time in power, the voluntary and community sector was positioned as a partner to the State. At the local level, there have been increased expectations for the public sector to engage with the voluntary and community sector. This was initiated by new tools and mechanism for supporting partnership working at the local level, namely Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs). LSPs were introduced as part of the Local Government Act 2000 with the aim of encouraging the private, public and voluntary and community sectors to deliver services and develop strategy more effectively.

This was coupled with greater expectations for the voluntary and community sector to engage with local government and, equally, an increasing recognition amongst partners that engaging with the voluntary and community sector could support local authorities to achieve their strategic policy objectives. This was part of a wider appreciation throughout the late 1990s and the 2000s as to the social and economic contribution of the voluntary and community sector in society.

¹⁵¹ See <http://www.vsnw.org.uk/members/definition>

Professionalisation of the sector

Conducted in 2004/05, *The Gershon Review of Public Sector Efficiency*¹⁵² sought to make recommendations as to how public sector bodies, and their partners, could deliver public services more effectively and efficiently. The recommendations led to significant changes in public sector and local authority procurement practices. As part of this, we have seen a shift from grants to voluntary and community sector organisations, towards a culture of commissioning and contracting-out public services to local voluntary and community sector organisations.

Running in parallel to this was a range of government activities, policies and initiatives that operated with the specific aim of building the capacity of the voluntary and community sector (e.g. ChangeUp and Futurebuilders – two Cabinet Office programmes introduced by the Home Office in 2004 in response to the 2002 HM Treasury review of the sector's ability to deliver public services).

The role of voluntary and community sector organisations in delivering public services

The need and expectation for the voluntary and community sector to engage with local government and the increasing professionalisation of the sector should both be understood as part of a wider shift in which the sector has been positioned as a deliverer of public services. The publication of the Deakin Commission's Report¹⁵³ in 1996 is widely believed to have set the agenda for action and change in the voluntary and community sector. The Deakin Report is significant because it set out the importance of the performance and efficiency of voluntary and community sector organisations. Under the Labour Government, the professionalisation of the sector went hand in hand with increasing expectations on the voluntary and community sector to deliver public services. This particularly led to a transition within the sector from campaigning and lobbying to service delivery.

A growth in capacity building and neighbourhood renewal funding

Over the last ten years there has been some funding available for both area based initiatives such as Neighbourhood Renewal Fund and for capacity building activities for the voluntary and community sector, such as ChangeUp. From the early activities of the Community Empowerment Networks through to voluntary and community sector representation on Local Strategic Partnerships, this funding has led to the growth of representative and equality group specific organisations. Given the equalities and diversity considerations of programmes such as the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, and the drive towards diverse delivery in contracting, there has been particular growth in equalities focused infrastructure organisations and groups.

The expansion of the equalities sector in relation to legislation

Under the previous Labour Government we witnessed the growth of equalities legislation, including: Sex Discrimination (Gender Reassignment) Regulations 1999; the Race Relations Amendment Act (2000); Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003; Employment Equality (Religion and Belief) Regulations 2003; the Gender Recognition Act 2004; the Civil Partnership Act 2004; the Disability Discrimination Act 2004; and the Equality Act 2006. The expansion of equalities legislation was complemented by the growth in equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations, and the recognition that a thriving and effective voluntary and community sector is important for supporting equalities issues. Targeted government funds and initiatives (e.g. the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund) were introduced with the aim of supporting growth within equalities voluntary and community sector organisations.

The continued need for representation amongst marginalised groups

Research by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (2010)¹⁵⁴ shows that the UK is characterised by a range of persistent inequalities: women aged 40 earn on average 27% less than men of the same age; by the age of 22-24, figures suggest that 44% of Black people are not in education, employment or training, compared to fewer than 25% of White people; and 50% of disabled adults are in work compared to 79% of non-disabled adults. In this context, there is a continued need for voluntary and community sector organisations that support the needs of marginalised groups to lobby and campaign for greater equality.

¹⁵² HM Treasury (2004) Releasing resources to the front line: Independent Review of Public Sector Efficiency, accessed at: http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/efficiency_review120704.pdf

¹⁵³ NCVO (1996) Meeting the challenge of change: voluntary action in the 21st century: The report of the Commission on the Future of the Voluntary Sector

¹⁵⁴ EHRC (2010) How fair is Britain?, accessed at <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/key-projects/how-fair-is-britain/>

The changing relationship between the voluntary and community sector and the State

This research project is positioned in the context of wider changes regarding the position of the voluntary and community sector in relation to the State. In the section that follows, we briefly consider four key waves in the relationship between the voluntary and community sector and the State.

Wave 1: Voluntary and community sector organisations as challengers and campaigners

From the mid-twentieth century through to the late 1970s, the majority of public services and social welfare provision was planned, funded and delivered by government agencies: the heyday of the Welfare State. During this time, whilst often funded by public monies, the voluntary and community sector largely operated at a distance from the State. The role of the sector at this time was to campaign, lobby and support marginalised groups. The comprehensive provision offered by the Welfare State meant that the voluntary and community sector played a very limited role in public service delivery. By the 1970s, this led to the emergence of a whole range of special interest organisations that campaigned around particular themes, including anti-racist, feminist and environmentally focused organisations.

Wave 2: Voluntary and community sector organisations as social welfare providers

From the 1980s onwards we saw a significant change in the role of the voluntary and community sector and the way in which public services were delivered. Thatcher's Government promoted the idea of 'welfare pluralism' – the notion that the State is not always best placed to meet the needs of individuals and communities – and crucially, the view that the public sector is not always the most efficient provider. As a result, voluntary and community sector organisations were positioned in parallel to the public sector as providers of essential public services – especially in the field of social care and social welfare. This resulted in a movement away from arm's length grant funding towards a contractual relationship between the public sector and the voluntary and community sector. However, despite this trend, equalities voluntary and community sector organisations continued to play an important role in campaigning and lobbying for marginalised groups.

Wave 3: Voluntary and community sector organisations as partners

The contractual relationship under the Conservative Governments of the 1980s and early 1990s gave way to a more subtle relationship following 'New' Labour's victory in the 1997 election. In particular, there was the emergence of the rhetoric of 'partnership' between the public sector and the voluntary and community sector in delivering services and also in working together to meet social and economic challenges. Whilst there was a change, or 'softening' of the neo liberal language of the 1980s, there was nevertheless a continued belief that the voluntary and community sector can and should deliver public services under contract. The decade saw the emergence of a range of policy papers and initiatives to this effect, including the 2002 document *'The role of the voluntary and community sector in service delivery'*.

Wave 4: Voluntary and community sector organisations as part of a 'diversity of public sector suppliers'

Following the election of a Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government in the 2010 general election, we have witnessed the emergence of another distinct wave in the relationship between the voluntary and community sector and the State. The Localism Bill, published in 2010, set out the Coalition Government's vision to re-localise the running of services and to de-centralise powers and responsibilities to the neighbourhood level. A key element of the Bill is to open up public services to a broader range of suppliers from both the voluntary and community sector and the private sector, part of a wider ambition to reduce state dependency. We are therefore witnessing a continuation of the movement from grant-based funding to contracts that we saw under the previous Labour Government, but this is being framed by a wider context of public sector austerity and subsequent uncertainty regarding the financial sustainability of the sector.

The social and economic value of the voluntary and community sector

The last ten years have seen significant attention given to the economic and social role of the voluntary and community sector. In this section we introduce some of the key policy areas that the voluntary and community sector contributes towards.

The value of the voluntary and community sector in local economic development

The scale of the voluntary and community sector's contribution to the UK economy is difficult to capture, however the 'State of Social Enterprise Survey 2009'¹⁵⁵ found that Social Enterprises alone contribute £24 billion to the UK economy. At the local level, there are numerous ways in which the voluntary and community sector promotes economic development. Many of the wide ranging activities delivered by the voluntary and community sector have a direct positive impact on local economies: from the provision of employment services to environmental improvement activities that serve to make localities more attractive to investors. Moreover, in providing opportunities for local people to volunteer, the sector plays an important role in raising skills and competencies within communities which can ultimately help enhance the employability of residents.

The value of the voluntary and community sector in improving health and wellbeing

The voluntary and community sector has a significant positive impact not only on place, in terms of local economic development and improvement, but also on people. Academic studies (see Thoits et al, 2001)¹⁵⁶ have demonstrated that volunteering can have a positive effect on a range of aspects of individual wellbeing, including: happiness; life satisfaction; self-esteem; sense of control over life; improved physical health; and alleviating depression. In providing opportunities for volunteering, the voluntary and community sector helps to both encourage active, engaged and interested communities, and in the longer term has the potential to promote better health and wellbeing.

The value of the voluntary and community sector in encouraging community empowerment

The last ten years have been characterised by a range of policy developments that have sought to empower communities to affect local decision making. The Empowerment White Paper 2008 aimed to provide the mechanisms by which communities could be more empowered to engage with local decision making and become more active in their community. Proposals were focused upon local authorities through dedicated funding (e.g. duty to promote democracy to develop the activities of community anchor organisations) and upon the community (e.g. a range of measures designed to stimulate community involvement in decision making, such as the promotion of participatory budgeting). It has long been recognised that the voluntary and community sector has the potential to play an important role as a route through which the public sector and local government in particular can engage communities. Moreover, the fact that many voluntary and community sector organisations' *raison d'être* is to represent and protect the interests of marginalised groups means the sector plays an important role in delivering bottom-up community empowerment.

Current context

The aim of the previous discussion was to: define the voluntary and community sector; introduce some of the drivers of change in the sector in recent years; explore the changing relationship between the sector and the State; and finally to introduce the voluntary and community sector's economic and social role. In this section, the report turns to consider more closely the current context in which this research sits. In particular, we begin by critiquing two fundamental shifts in policy rhetoric: the movement away from 'equality' and towards 'fairness'; and also the movement from 'communities of interest' to 'neighbourhoods'.

Shifting rhetoric

In the section that follows, we attempt to unpick two of the emerging policy trends affecting equalities issues in the UK:

- ❑ we examine the changing policy rhetoric from 'equalities' towards 'fairness' (this is also detailed in the main body of the report);
- ❑ we consider the absence of equalities considerations within recent policy agendas before moving on to discuss the apparent shift in thinking from 'communities of interest' to 'neighbourhoods'.

¹⁵⁵ See: http://www.socialenterprise.org.uk/pages/state_of_social_enterprise.html

¹⁵⁶ Thoits, P. A. & Hewitt, L. N. (2001), 'Volunteer Work and Wellbeing', *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 2001, Volume 42, Issue 2, pp.151-131

From 'equality' to 'fairness'

Published in December 2010, the Coalition Government's Equality Strategy is a landmark document and the first clear statement of the Coalition Government's stance on equalities issues. The strategy opens with a strong statement: *'Equality is at the heart of this Coalition Government'* yet the report sets out significant changes in the way in which we *understand* equality. The report states:

'We need to move beyond defining people simply because they've ticked a box on a form.'

This seemingly straightforward statement reveals a lot about the Coalition Government's approach. Clearly, on one level this statement is correct: there *is* more to an individual's identity than that which can be captured by crude questionnaires. Identity is multi-faced, cross-cutting and ever changing. Indeed, categorising identity for statistical purposes is undoubtedly problematic.

A more sensitive understanding of identity that appreciates its complexity would therefore be welcome; however the implication of this statement is that monitoring equality and diversity is merely a bureaucratic and regressive exercise. Indeed, this could be understood as part of the Coalition Government's wider objective to reduce target setting and monitoring, which has included the dissolving of the Audit Commission and the end of the Comprehensive Area Assessment and Local Area Agreements.

This critique of target setting and, in particular, monitoring equality and diversity across all characteristics, can be interpreted as evidence of a prioritisation of equality of opportunity over equality of outcome. This is suggested in the following quotation, again taken from the Coalition Government's Equality Strategy:

'No one should be held back because of who they are or their background. But, equally, no one should be defined simply by these characteristics. We want a society where people are recognised for who they are and what they achieve, not where they are from.'

The importance of this change in rhetoric should not be underestimated. For the voluntary and community sector it will mean greater emphasis on mainstream activities, as opposed to support for specialist services that target and meet the needs of marginalised groups.

This emphasis on equality of opportunity and the apparent shift from diversity monitoring is best understood within the context of wider debate regarding identity politics and, in particular, the continued movement away from policy making based on the concept of 'communities of interest' that we to turn explore in the following discussion.

From 'targeted' to 'mainstream'?

On 22 March 2011, it was revealed that no equalities organisations will receive funding as Strategic Partners to the Office for Civil Society. The Strategic Partners Programme was launched in 2006 with the aim of establishing a longer term relationship between the Government and the voluntary and community sector and to fulfil specific policy objectives. Four organisations previously in receipt of Strategic Partners funding will lose out: Voice4Change; the Council of Ethnic Minority Voluntary Organisations; the Women's Resource Centre; and the Consortium of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered Voluntary Organisations. This step can be interpreted as part of the movement away from government funding for activities that promote equality within target communities of interest, and towards a mainstreamed approach based on 'fairness' and equality of opportunity.

From 'communities of interest' to 'neighbourhoods'?

The aforementioned Equality Strategy describes the Coalition Government's approach to tackling inequality as:

'One that moves away from treating people as groups of 'equality strands' and instead recognises that we are a nation of 62 million individuals.'

This conveys a clear message that the Coalition Government is advocating a shift away from an understanding of equality that is based on the concept of 'communities of interest'.

'Communities of interest' is used to describe groups of individuals that have a shared interest, often centred on identity based characteristics that are common across the group, such as sexuality, gender or ethnicity. 'Communities of interest' is therefore based on an appreciation that shared identity can create a common bond across groups of individuals, yet the fluid and multi-faceted nature of identity means that individuals may be associated with more than one community of interest. Because of this, defining communities of interest can be challenging. However, for the purpose of this research, we have identified the following themes around which groups of individuals may identify:

- faith;
- race;
- gender;
- age;
- disability;
- sexuality.

Communities of interest may also be formed around individuals' status as:

- gypsies or travellers;
- refugees or asylum seekers.

The value of 'communities of interest'

Identifying a community of interest is personally, socially and politically progressive. Whilst not exclusively, communities of interest typically exist to represent the views and voices of groups of people that are disadvantaged or marginalised in society (e.g. these people might have limited access to decision making processes or few platforms to express their opinions or concerns). From a theoretical perspective, the concept of communities of interest is closely linked to postcolonial theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's notion of strategic essentialism. This refers to the strategy whereby groups 'essentialise' themselves according to a particular identity based marker (e.g. gender, sexuality or ethnicity) and use this shared group identity to achieve certain goals, such as equal rights.

The idea of communities of interest underpinned the multiculturalism model which came to the fore in the 1970s. Multiculturalism is one of a range of approaches that have developed internationally over the past fifty years in response to changing patterns of migration and the subsequent increase in ethnic diversity. Multiculturalism, sometimes referred to as cultural pluralism, involves the active promotion of cultural or ethnic differences (e.g. state supported celebrations for minority religious festivals).

In the latter part of the twentieth century, the complementary concepts of communities of interest and multiculturalism had a significant impact on the way in which the voluntary sector has developed and how it has been supported by the State. The 1970s saw the emergence of a host of voluntary and community sector organisations operating with the explicit aim of promoting the interests of targeted communities of interest, such as Southall Black Sisters, a not-for-profit organisation established in 1979 to meet the needs of black and minority ethnic women, particularly those experiencing violent relationships.

Beyond the sphere of ethnicity and 'race', the notion of communities of interest, or the idea of collective action based around aspects of shared identity, has underpinned the development of equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations across all of the themes identified above (i.e. faith, sexuality, gender and disability).

From 'communities of interest' to 'community cohesion'

Whilst Prime Minister David Cameron hit the headlines with his proclamation of the 'end of state multiculturalism'¹⁵⁷ the shift in government approach – in particular the movement away from multiculturalism – can be traced back to 2001 which proved a turning point in UK government policy. In the summer of that year, disturbances broke out between young White and South Asian men in Oldham, Bradford and Burnley. In response, Ted Cante was commissioned by the Government to undertake a study into the causes of the disturbances, what came to be known as the Cante Report. The report argued that the fundamental cause of this unrest was communities operating on the basis of a series of 'parallel lives'. In other words, these communities were living in a state of segregation, rather than integration, and that communities were failing to interact in a meaningful way, neither in work, school nor in their neighbourhoods.

¹⁵⁷ See: <http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/speeches-and-transcripts/2011/02/pms-speech-at-munich-security-conference-60293>

To overcome this, Cattle proposed a new approach to responding to diversity: community cohesion. Community cohesion, according to Cattle, is characterised by: strong common values and civic culture; social control and order; social solidarity; social networks and social capital; and strong place attachment and identity. In essence, the Cattle Report was arguing that by developing a shared sense of local (and British) identity, and by emphasising what communities had in common, there would be greater interaction between different groups reducing the likelihood of future unrest.

The Cattle Report was critical of multiculturalism and suggested that in 'celebrating difference' it had encouraged divisions between different ethnic groups. For Cattle, local authorities had been misguided in funding voluntary and community sector projects that targeted sole ethnic minority communities. In contrast, the report argued:

'Funding bodies should presume against separate funding of distinct communities, and require collaborative working, save for those circumstances where the need for funding is genuinely only evident in one section of the community and can only be provided separately.'

Whilst its initial focus was on issues around ethnicity, race and faith, the community cohesion agenda can be seen to have led the shift away from communities of interest and towards a more mainstreamed approach which emphasises what people share in common (i.e. a shared identity based on place-based values) rather than distinguishing characteristics such as age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity or faith. Therefore, interestingly, in some respects the community cohesion agenda can be seen as contradictory to the development of equalities legislation under the Labour Government that aimed to protect and support the interests of communities of interests.

From 'community cohesion' to 'big society': The impact on voluntary and community sector funding

The publication of the Cattle Report therefore raised an important and hotly contested debate as to how voluntary and community sector organisations should be funded. In 2007, the Commission on Integration and Cohesion published its final report, entitled '*Our Shared Future*'¹⁵⁸. Like the Cattle Report before it, the report argued that the presumption should be against single identity funding:

'Unless there is a clear reason for capacity building within a group or community.'

Unsurprisingly, this led to concern about the future of the sector, with speculation that groups would be forced to merge with other organisations or to prove they offered generic services that are 'open for all'. Whilst the report focused on funding for groups serving black and minority ethnic communities, this is symptomatic of a wider movement away from a communities of interest based interpretation of identity, centred around ethnicity, gender, sexuality and disability: emphasising markers of difference was seen as a threat to shared identity.

Whilst this shift in approach was introduced under a Labour Government, the current Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition appears to be in agreement. Baroness Warsi has argued:

'We need to move towards a mainstreaming of minority ethnic and religious groups. We need to move towards a place where we don't treat them as specific interest groups.'

Whilst we explore the details of the big society and localism agendas in the main body of the report, it is interesting to reflect on what the two agendas tell us about how the Coalition Government is conceptualising identity; underpinning both the Localism Bill and the big society agenda is the Coalition Government's vision of giving residents greater opportunities and responsibility for shaping the social and economic destiny of place and, in particular, for designing and delivering local services. Much of the rhetoric that has emerged with these two agendas has focused on the neighbourhood as the geographical scale at which localism and the big society will happen (e.g. the Localism Bill proposes the introduction of 'neighbourhood plans', with the aim of reforming the planning system with the view to giving residents greater powers to influence local development, alongside new powers to bid for the ownership and management of community assets).

¹⁵⁸ Commission on Integration & Cohesion (2007) *Our Shared Future*, accessed at: <http://image.guardian.co.uk/sys-files/Education/documents/2007/06/14/oursharedfuture.pdf>

Central to these policy ideas is the concept of neighbourhoods; however the concept of neighbourhoods is a relative and socially constructed one: many people identify with 'communities' that transcend their local area (e.g. being a member of a particular ethnic group or sharing the same sexual orientation). Consequently, whilst geography (i.e. the neighbourhood in which we live) has an important impact on our identity, this does not necessarily mean that it is the most effective scale to mobilise the type of social action that the big society advocates: communities of interest may be more appropriate.

Moreover, following Amin (2005)¹⁵⁹, we should be wary of the proposition that increasing levels of active citizenship and restoring a sense of 'community' can 'fix' deprived neighbourhoods; whether couched in the policy rhetoric of community cohesion, active citizenship or, most recently, the big society. Academics such as Burnett (2004)¹⁶⁰ have criticised the community cohesion agenda for distracting from the social and economic inequalities that face deprived communities. Whilst the rhetoric has moved on, the same challenge can be made of the big society agenda. Whilst the Coalition Government increases expectations for communities to get involved in their local neighbourhoods, there is little recognition within the big society and localism agenda as to how persistent, structural inequalities may act as a barrier to participation, or how the Coalition Government intends to ensure that these agendas are inclusive.

¹⁵⁹ Amin, A. (2005), 'Local Community on Trial', *Economy and Society*, 2005, Volume 34, Issue 4, pp.612-633

¹⁶⁰ Burnett, J. (2004), 'Community, Cohesion and the State', *Race & Class*, 2004, Volume 45, Issue 1, pp.1-18



APPENDIX 3

Focus group attendees

FOCUS GROUP ATTENDEES

The focus groups were arranged in partnership with the steering group and the partner organisations highlighted below. Each attendee was given a copy of the policy think-piece in advance of the discussion to provide some context.

Group	Date	Number of Attendees	Lead host organisations	
BME	14th April	35	One North West	
Women	27th May	71	Women's Solidarity Forum	
Young People	2nd June	6	North West Regional Youth Work Unit	
Trans	4th June	8		
LGB	6th June	5	Lesbian and Gay Foundation	
LGB	9th June	8	Lesbian and Gay Foundation	
Older	10th June	5	50/50 Vision	
BME	10th June	6	One North West	
Cumbria	13th June	6		
Faith (Cumbria)	13th June	6		
Refugee and Asylum Seeker	10th June	5	Refugee Action	
Disabled	14th June	6	Merseyside Disability Federation	

Group	Date	Number of Attendees	Lead host organisations	Group
Liverpool	14 th June	8	Merseyside Disability Federation	
Young	16 th June	24	Children & Young People NW	
Blackburn with Darwen	16 th June	6		

APPENDIX 4

Questionnaire proforma

QUESTIONNAIRE PROFORMA

The questionnaire was sent out with the support of the steering groups members to equalities focused voluntary and community sector organisations across the North West region.

Introduction

This survey is being conducted by the Centre for Local Policy Studies at Edge Hill University for the North West Infrastructure partnership, a body representing a range of organisations involved with equalities in the voluntary and community sector. The aim of the survey is to consider the impact of four major areas of change in government policy and ask how these are affecting voluntary and third sector organisations and what impact these changes are having on equalities in the North West. The survey is part of a wider research project involving focus groups and case studies from across the region. We are inviting voluntary and third sector organisations from across the north-west region, with an interest in equalities, to participate in the survey which will provide valuable information on the impact of current policies on equalities across the region.

The think piece can be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/6gygd64>.

Filling in the questionnaire will take about ten minutes. Where you are choosing a response from multiple choices just click on the choice and a tick will appear. You can cancel that choice by clicking again on the box again. Then proceed with other choices. You can change your mind as often as you wish by clicking once to make a choice and then clicking again to cancel.

Where there is a box asking for a written response, you select the box by clicking on it and then typing using your keypad. If you are having difficulties completing the questionnaire contact clpsorg@edgehill.ac.uk or ring 01695 584 765.

Please complete the survey by 25th July 2011. When you click 'done' the questionnaire is automatically collected.

1. What government policies are we concerned with?

The survey is concerned with a number of themes which may have a significant effect on people within the protected characteristics. The themes that we are particularly interested in are:

- 1) The effect of austerity measures taken by government or government bodies
- 2) The effect of the welfare reform agenda
- 3) The effect of the health and social care agenda
- 4) The effect of new legislation on localism and on economic development through the Local Growth Bill.

The changes will have a different impact on organisations and services and you may not know what effect some legislation will have. There is a don't know option in the questionnaire to allow for this.

If you have any doubts about what these policies are, or what we mean by the term 'equalities' there are some brief notes accompanying the e-mail that was sent to you containing this survey. Just go to the attachment marked 'additional information' to find these notes.

2. Your organisation

This section will tell us about your organisation and its work. It is important that we know how different parts of the voluntary sector are affected by current changes and this information will help us to understand these differences.

1. * What is the name of your organisation? _____
2. * What is your role in the organisation? _____
3. * What is your postcode? _____

4. * Which of these best describes your organisation?

- We focus on a single equality strand
- We focus on multiple equality strands
- We focus on equality issues more generally
- Equalities is an important part of our work but not the main focus

5. How would you rate your involvement with each category? 1 denotes low involvement 5 denotes high involvement

	1	2	3	4	5
Race/ethnicity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gender	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sexual Orientation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Transgender	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Faith/Belief	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Younger people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Older people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Disability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Poverty/social exclusion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We have a general focus on equality/equalities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	_____				

6. * How are you involved with these categories?

7. How would you define your organisation?

- A local organisation
- A regional organisation
- A national organisation
- Part of a national organisation delivering services locally
- Part of a regional organisation delivering services locally
- Other (please specify) _____

8. What kind of service do you provide? Please tick one or more than one if necessary.

- Advice and Guidance
- Campaigning
- Advocacy
- Services for individuals
- Support to other organisations
- Other (please specify) _____

9. What is your service about? Please tick one or more than once if necessary.

- Education and training
- Employment
- Health and care services
- Welfare and benefits
- Leisure and recreation
- Organisational support
- Other (please specify) _____

10. Which of the following best describes the area where you deliver services?

- Neighbourhood or Parish
- Town of local authority district
- City-wide
- County or sub-region
- Region (e.g. North West)
- Nationally

3. Funding and resources

This section will help us understand how current changes are affecting the resources available to the VCS equality organisation in the region.

11. Where in the following range did your budget fall in the last three financial years?

	£5000 or less	£5,000-£10,000	£10,000-£50,000	£50,000-£100,000	£100,000 to £1m	£1m-10m
2009/2010	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2010/2011	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2011/2012	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	_____					

12. Please estimate what proportion of funding comes from the following sources

	Percentage of income
Central government contracts	[]
Central government grants	[]
EU Funding (ESF or ERDF)	[]
Local authority contracts	[]
Local authority grants	[]
Charity grants (e.g. lottery)	[]
NHS contracts	[]
Self generated through sales of goods and services	[]
PCT grants	[]
Other contracts	[]
Other grants	[]
Private sector donations and grants	[]
Private sector through sub-contracting	[]
Any additional comment	[]

13. Has there been a change in your income in the current year (2011/12) as compared with last year (2010/11)?

- An increase
- No change
- A reduction

Please estimate the percentage change. _____

14. Please tell us about changes in the number of paid staff employed in your local organisation/branch

Total number of full-time staff 2009/10	[]
Total number of full-time staff 2010/11	[]
Total number of full-time staff 2011/12	[]
Total number of part-time staff 2009/10	[]
Total number of part-time staff 2010/11	[]
Total number of part-time staff 2011/12	[]

15. If there has been a change, please tell us the reasons for this change.

16. Please tell us about changes in the number of volunteers working in your local organisation/branch

Total number of volunteers 2009/10 _____

Total number of volunteers 2010/11 _____

Total number of volunteers 2011/12 _____

17. If there has been a change, please tell us the reasons for this change.

18. If you are funded by a public body did it undertake an Equality Impact Assessment on the effects of any change in the budget?

Equality Impact Assessment

Yes

No

19. If you are funded by a public body, did the funder/s follow the Voluntary Sector Compact?

Followed compact guidelines

Yes

No

20. A range of new initiatives are being rolled out across England and the North West. Are you involved in any of the following? Please select from the drop down menu

We were involved in:

Yes

No

Other (please specify) Other initiatives (please state) _____

4. The impact of changes on your services

Over the past 12 months, have the services your organisation offers been affected by either changes in funding or staffing? Please indicate areas in which change has taken place.

21. Have the services your organisation offers been affected by either changes in funding or staffing over the last 12 months? Please indicate areas in which change has take place.

	Significant positive impact	Some positive impact	No change	Some negative impact	Significant negative impact	Don't know
Services offered to existing clients	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provision of services to new clients	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Geographical coverage of your services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Partnership work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Capacity to lobby or consult	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Working conditions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conditions for volunteers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

What in your view has been the most significant on what your organisation does?

22. In your opinion, will equality for the communities you service be affected by the policy changes described at the beginning of the survey?

	Significant positive impact	Some positive impact	No change	Some negative impact	Significant negative impact	Don't know
Localism agenda	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Welfare reform	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health and social care reform	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Big society	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local growth agenda	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please tell us in what ways equalities may be affected.

23. If there has been a change in your services, in what ways will these impact on your community?

	Significant positive impact	Some positive impact	No change	Some negative impact	Significant negative impact	Don't know
Ability of service users to engage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Community development	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advocacy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Employment opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Independent advice and guidance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Community tensions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Harassment and discrimination	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Domestic violence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Crime	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Anti-social behaviour	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Homelessness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Volunteering	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<hr/>					

24. Please tell us in your own words how communities you serve will be affected by the impact on your services. Click on the box to type in your response.

5. Monitoring future impact of change

As the final part of the survey we are canvassing your views about how we should measure change for each of the prescribed characteristics. Below you will find a list of the protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. If you have a view, tell us what you think would be a good indicator of change for one of more of the protected characteristics.

- 25. Please tell us, where possible, of any useful measures that you think would be valuable in looking at future impact on any of the protected characteristics. You don't need to fill in all of the boxes, only those where you have a clear idea of the things we should be measuring in the future. There is some additional space below if you require it. click on the relevant boxes to type in your response.**

Race/ethnicity	_____
Gender	_____
Sexual orientation	_____
Transgender	_____
Faith/belief	_____
Younger people	_____
Older people	_____
Disability	_____
Maternity	_____
Social deprivation	_____
Other (please state)	_____

6. Thank you

Thank you for taking the time to complete the survey. We are planning to keep you informed of our findings and these will form part of a report to NWIP in September. Keep an eye on the CLPS blog <http://blogs.edgehill.ac.uk/clps/>

APPENDIX 5

Equality Impact Assessment considerations

UNDERSTANDING EQUALITY IMPACT

The main objective of this study is to understand the equality impact of the wide ranging policies set out in Section 2. The purpose of this appendix is to highlight the processes of undertaking equality impact assessments (EqIA's). This review will help examine the EqIA's conducted by government departments and allow us to set out the importance of a community 'voice' in understanding impact. The discussion of community 'voice' forms the basis for our own assessment conducted in Sections 3-7 of this report.

In order to carry out our analysis we have had to review current practice in relation to EqIA and consider the methodological challenges posed by the scale of this project. In considering the role and purpose of EqIA, we have taken the model set out by the Equality and Human Rights Commission '*A step by step guide to integrating equality impact assessment into policymaking and review*' (EHRC, 2009). The guide sets out the methods that should be adopted in carrying out an EqIA and explains the purpose of carrying out an assessment and how it should be used in the policy making process.

The purpose of EqIA and undertaking it

'EIAs help public authorities meet the requirements of the equality duties and identify active steps they can take to promote equality. Carrying out an EIA involves systematically assessing the likely (or actual) effects of policies on people in respect of disability, gender and racial equality and, where authorities choose, wider equality areas. This includes looking for opportunities to promote equality that have previously been missed or could be better used, as well as negative or adverse impacts that can be removed or mitigated, where possible. If any negative or adverse impacts amount to unlawful discrimination, they must be removed.'¹⁶¹

An EqIA should therefore sensitise the policy process to the effects that a policy is likely to have on those people defined as having 'protected characteristics' (see Appendix 1) in order to 'pay due regard to equality'. Importantly, they should act to remedy any aspects of policy that would be unlawfully discriminatory either through 'direct' or 'indirect' discrimination.

In conducting an EqIA there are a number of recommended steps:

- ❑ **setting the scope of the assessment** – this part of the process is important because it sets the limits of assessment. Policies can be far reaching or interlinked and therefore by setting the scope of the assessment the policy makers are placing limits on the work to be carried out and defining clearly what they are looking at – this is about making EqIA manageable;
- ❑ **understanding the policy** – having a clear understanding of the policy to be developed is essential, this would include: the purpose of the proposed policy; the context within which it will operate; who it is intended to benefit; and the results aimed for. It should also examine its link to other policies;
- ❑ **understanding the relevance to equality** – this part of the assessment requires an exploration of the policy to understand its implications in relation to equality legislation, and which of the protected characteristics may be most affected. At the earliest stages, public authorities should identify which key aspects of the policy are relevant to equality. This does not mean that other aspects should be excluded from the assessment, but it will help to focus attention on the most important areas. The inter-relationship of policies will also need to be considered;
- ❑ **collection of evidence** – initially this involves the collection of evidence from available sources in the form of published statistics, such as census data or relevant research studies and audit reports. The important thing is to carry out research into the relevant data and information sources;
- ❑ **identify gaps in data** – identify any gaps in the data and the importance of these gaps in making the assessment. Any actions to fill the gaps in data should be proportionate and appropriate.

Involving the community

The information and insights that can be gained from involvement and consultation form a crucial part of the EIA process. Public authorities should first look to data from recent consultation, involvement and research activities; this could be on a recent related policy, a strategy that the policy is partly implementing or recent EIA by the same department. Indeed, this can also help to build confidence among communities, who can see that what they have said is being acted on. Being asked the same thing repeatedly without visible action is a common cause of dissatisfaction with consultation and involvement.

¹⁶¹ EHRC Bid

Assessment of impact

Having carried out an EqIA, the public authority would be expected to act upon its findings and, according to the guidance, would have four options:

- ❑ **Outcome 1: No major change** – the EIA demonstrates the policy is robust and there is no potential for discrimination or adverse impact. All opportunities to promote equality have been taken;
- ❑ **Outcome 2: Adjust the policy** – the EIA identifies potential problems or missed opportunities. Adjust the policy to remove barriers or better promote equality;
- ❑ **Outcome 3: Continue the policy** – the EIA identifies the potential for adverse impact or missed opportunities to promote equality. Clearly set out the justifications for continuing with it; the justification should be included in the EIA and must be in line with the duty. To have due regard for the most important relevant policies, compelling reasons will be needed;
- ❑ **Outcome 4: Stop and remove the policy** – the policy shows actual or potential unlawful discrimination; it must be stopped and removed or changed (the codes of practice and guidance on each of the public sector duties on the Commission's website provide information about what constitutes unlawful discrimination).

Critique

The approach set out by the EHRC follows the same pattern established in guidance for the Equality Standard for Local Government in 2003 (Speeden & Clarke 2003). This model can provide a robust framework for assessment but the history of its effective use in the policy making process has raised a number of problems. In reviewing the Equality Standard for Local Government in 2007 (Speeden, 2007), it was found that there was a lack of understanding about how policymakers should apply these rules. More importantly, it appeared that EqIA, rather than being seen as an effective tool for shaping policy, was seen as a bureaucratic requirement that had to be fulfilled.

The sense of EqIA being a bureaucratic burden was reinforced for many involved in the policy process because of the lack of readily available evidence and data sources, the lack of understanding of equality principles, and the lack of understanding of how to apply the findings to the policy process. The result has often been that policymakers would apply screening processes and rules on proportionality (how many people was it likely to affect as part of the policy's target population) and manipulation of the scoping process as ways of limiting the application of the method.

While, in our view, the EqIA process can provide a valuable tool for assessing policy and addressing equality issues, it can only work effectively if there is a real commitment on the part of those involved in the process to make it work. Recent legal rulings on the use of EqIA may reinforce the view that these assessments may be necessary to demonstrate 'due regard to equality' but the monitoring of good practice in conducting and applying EqIA is more difficult. It should be acknowledged that there are real methodological and practical difficulties in applying this method in a complex policy environment.

The difficulties of applying the EqIA process have been of particular concern to us in developing this study. The policy context that we have described in Section 2 is large, complex and inter-related. Inevitably, there are a huge number of potential effects on equality. The second problem that we have encountered is that many of the policies are targeted specifically to have an effect on people having the protected characteristics. Many of the policies are directed very specifically at disabled people or older people, at young people and at the socially excluded. The policies will have a very clear negative impact on many people from within these groups; however the Government would argue that these policies will have a longer term beneficial impact. This means that the judgement of what is positive and what is negative impact may be contested and this poses a challenge for the assessment process.

Part of the problem in making an impact assessment around new policy initiatives lies not just in collecting data but in evaluating it and drawing conclusions. The guidance on EqIA tends to brush over the research problems that are associated with carrying out effective impact assessment and seems to assume that the assessment process – the way in which evidence is brought together and used to make a judgement – is unproblematic. Clearly, the conduct of EqIA's is less problematic (though not unproblematic) when dealing with retrospective EqIA's, where it is possible to look at what has been done and the effects it has had on different sections of the population. In undertaking a prospective impact assessment, and one in a complex policy environment, it is more difficult because the impact is based on predicted and not actual outcomes.

Both retrospective and prospective impact assessments face the problem of cause and effect, demonstrating that the policy in question has caused the adverse impact (for retrospective EqIA's) or may cause an adverse impact (for prospective EqIA's). Below we identify some of the strengths and weaknesses associated with EqIA, identified through research on EqIA's (Speeden, S) and review within the research team.

EqIA – Strengths and weaknesses

Strengths

- ❑ EqIA's are a powerful tool for helping policy makers come to an understanding of equalities impact.
- ❑ By employing research tools and a range of data sources, an EqIA can provide evidence that point to significant equality impact.
- ❑ Where little quantitative data exist on the use of consultation with potentially affected communities of interest (women, disabled groups, etc.), the assessment can build an understanding of potential impact.
- ❑ The involvement of communities can help in identifying policy changes, modifications and mitigation through an improved qualitative understanding of impact.
- ❑ Awareness of potential impact can help policy makers avoid adverse equality impact, establish monitoring around identified critical areas where impact may occur, and introduce mitigation through modification of policy or new policy initiatives.

Weaknesses

- ❑ In prospective EqIA's, research generally provides indicators of equality impact and not definitive predictions of outcome (in some cases there may be very strong indicators, in other cases they may be quite weak).
- ❑ Very detailed research on possible outcomes may be expensive and the spending on such research needs to be proportional to the likely scale of impact and the timescales for implementation.
- ❑ Understanding cause and effect in relation to large scale policy change may be difficult to assess.
- ❑ The initial EqIA may be treated as an end in itself rather than the start of a process that is monitoring the effect of policy and re-examining equality impact on a continuing basis.
- ❑ The scoping of EqIA's can mean that they take little account of other interconnected policies, the policy context or the social/economic context.
- ❑ The requirement through legislation to produce EqIA's may lead to a compliance mentality amongst policy makers where EqIA's are produced of necessity rather than as an integrated part of the policy process.

This summary of points is not comprehensive but it does provide a basis for reviewing the impact assessments that have been undertaken by the Government in relation to the policies that we are reviewing in the study. They also provide some key points of reflection for us to consider in relation to our own assessment and the conclusions that are drawn in Section 9.

APPENDIX 6

Membership of North West Infrastructure Partnership

APPENDIX 6: MEMBERSHIP OF THE NORTH WEST INFRASTRUCTURE PARTNERSHIP (NWIP)

The North West Infrastructure Partnership (NWIP) is a developing partnership of regional and sub-regional VCS infrastructure organisations who come together to provide a coherent voice for the voluntary and community sector at regional level. It is facilitated by VSNW.

NWIP's purpose is to improve the ability of the whole of the voluntary and community sector across the North West to influence local, regional and national policies and strategies, by bringing together infrastructure organisations around a shared agenda.

NWIP is a partnership of geographic, thematic and specialist infrastructure that, at the time of commissioning this research included:

Action for Children

Age UK

[Cheshire Community Action](#)

Community Alliance

Community Empowerment Practitioners Forum

Council of Ethnic Minority Voluntary Organisations

Cumbria CVS

[Greater Manchester Council for Voluntary Organisations](#)

[Lesbian and Gay Foundation](#)

[Merseyside Disability Foundation](#) / NW Disability Infrastructure Partnership

[Merseyside Network for Europe](#)

National Housing Federation NW Care and Support Forum

North West Council for Voluntary Youth Service

[North West Environment Link](#)

[North West Forum of Faiths](#)

North West Rural Community Councils

North West Tenants and Residents Assembly

North West VCS Learning and Skills Network

[One North West](#)

[Refugee Action](#)

North West Children and Young People's Partnership

Sefton CVS

[Social Enterprise Partnership North West](#)

Third Sector Lancashire

[VCS Engage](#)

[Voluntary Sector North West](#)

Volunteering North West