

Setting the Scene

The 'Big Society' and the new austerity

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Key themes

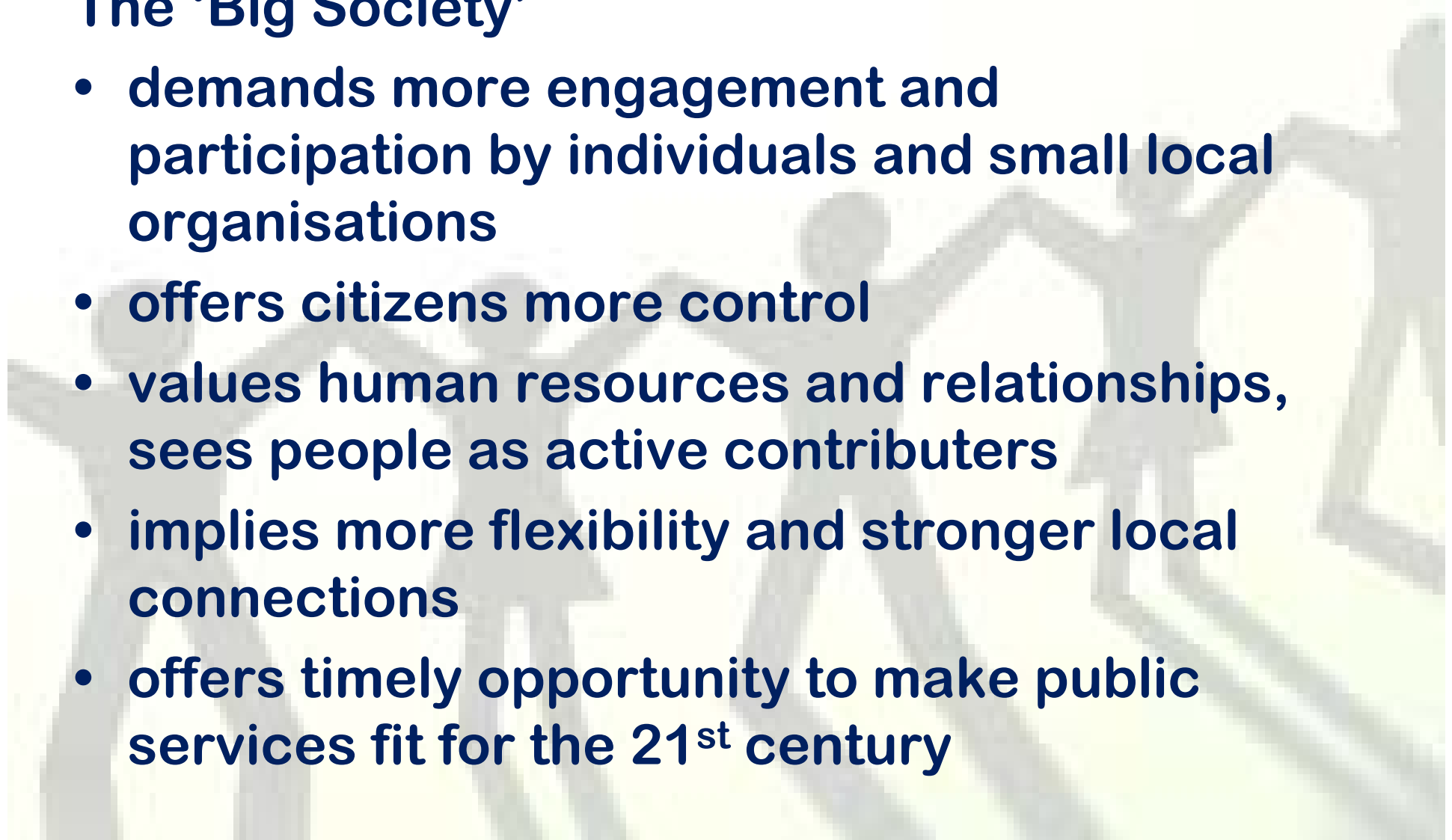
- **The policy context**
- **Social justice**
- **Big business and civil society**
- **The role of the state**
- **Making the best of it: growing the 'core economy'**
- **Future costs and benefits**



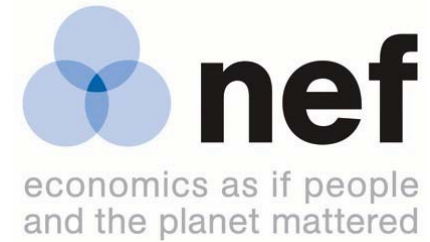
A force for good?

The 'Big Society'

- demands more engagement and participation by individuals and small local organisations
- offers citizens more control
- values human resources and relationships, sees people as active contributors
- implies more flexibility and stronger local connections
- offers timely opportunity to make public services fit for the 21st century



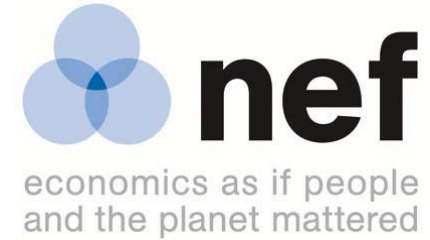
What is the intent?



‘From state power to people power.. From big government to the big society.’ (Prime Minister)

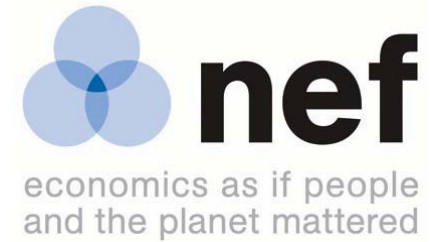
‘An audacious attempt to fashion a notion of social solidarity from the bricks of centre-right ideas... nothing less than to wean this country off its apparently unbreakable dependency on the state, centralism, welfare, and rule from Whitehall, the corrosive habits of half a century.’ (Steve Hilton, PM’s Director of Strategy)

Putting it into practice



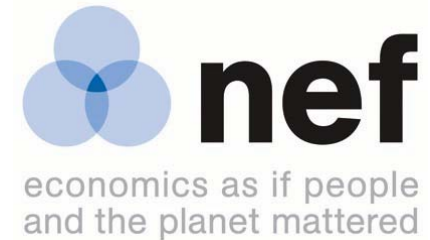
- **Strategy:** empowering communities... opening up public services... promoting ‘social action’
- **Methods:** pushing power down to the lowest possible level... more ‘transparency’... new planning laws to allow more direct action by citizens... ‘nudging’ not ‘nannying’
- **Initiatives:** ‘Big Society’ bank ... ‘Big Society’ Network... 5,000 full-time community organisers... ‘vanguard communities’...national Citizens’ Service... Office for Civil Society... Departmental units...structural reform plans to support the building of the ‘Big Society’...

Public spending cuts



- Council grants cut by 27 per cent cut to 2014-5; 14 per cent fall in spending
- £18 billion cut from welfare bill
- Up to 500,000 job losses in public sector; more than one million overall
- Only £470 million over four years to help 'civil society', to include 5,000 organisers, national citizens' service and £100 million for 'transitional' help.

Will the medicine work?



‘Big financial crises cast long shadows. This one is unlikely to be an exception to the rule. Stagflation in the short run and weak growth in the longer run are an unappealing combination. The Nice (“non-inflationary, consistently expansionary”) decade once described by Mervyn King, governor of the Bank of England, is gone. Welcome to the Nasty (“nightmare of austere and stagflationary years”).

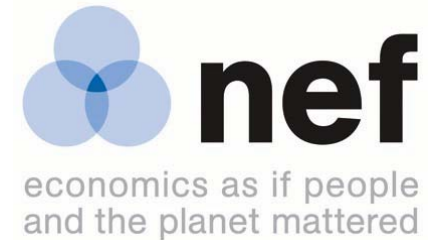
***Martin Woolf, Economics Editor, Financial Times,
(June 2011)***

Potential scale of change



- Together, if implemented, the ‘Big Society’ and the spending cuts mark the end of the post-war welfare settlement
- The ‘Big Society’ shifts responsibility from the state to individuals and families, and from public services to self-help, charity, local enterprise and global commerce.
- It is also a bid to replace paid with unpaid labour on a massive scale

Big enough for all?



Capacity to participate depends on education, income, family, environment, knowledge, confidence, time, energy.

Access is varied because organisations have boundaries drawn by kinship, law, friendship, duty, tradition, geography, politics, and class.... they include some and exclude others ... some are much more powerful.

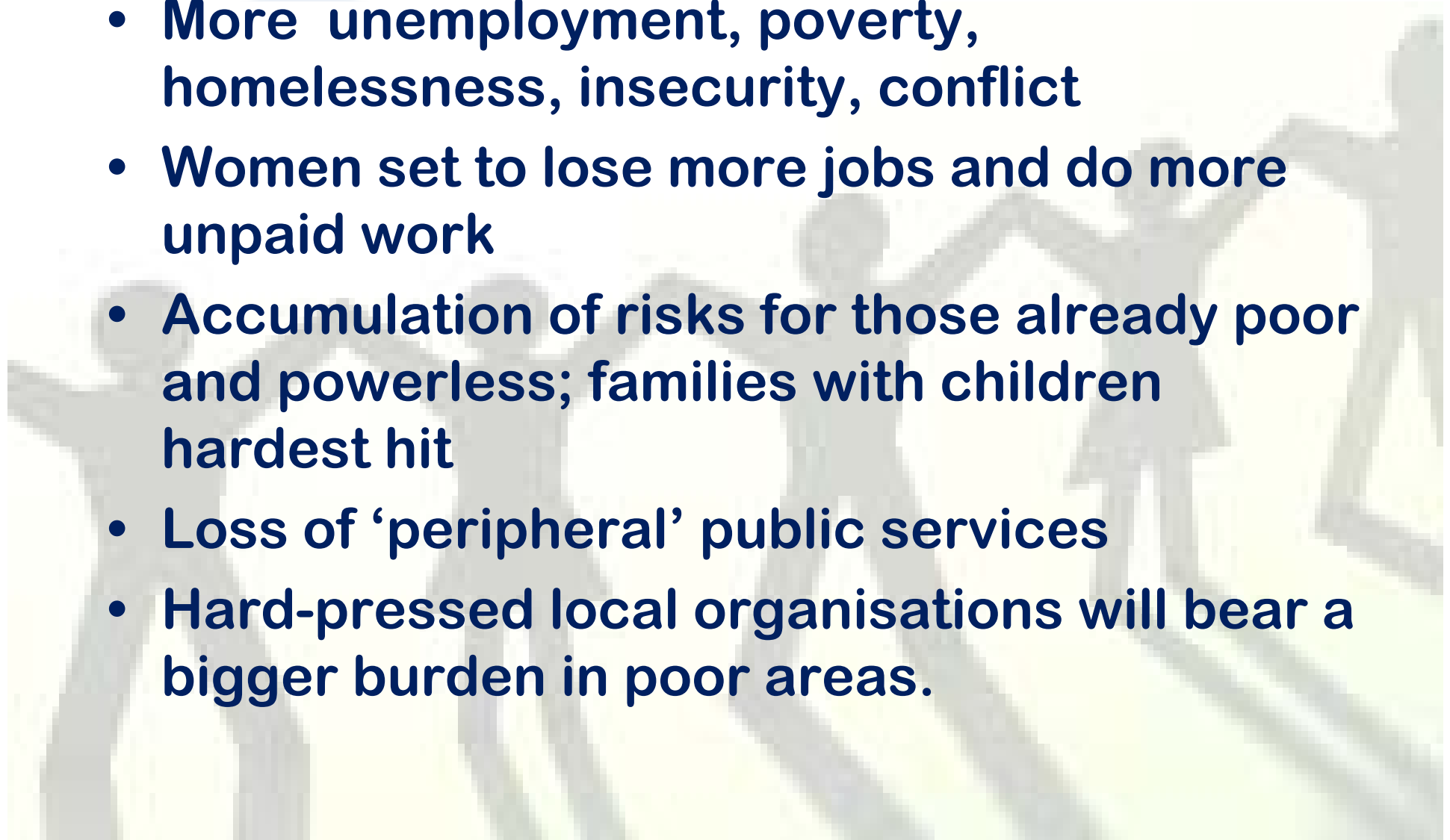
Time is needed to participate in the 'Big Society'. Some have much more control over their time than others, especially low earners with big family responsibilities.

Capacity, access and time...

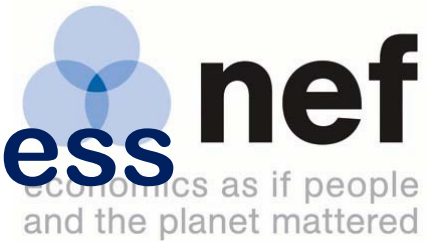
are all unequally distributed, so it may be much harder for those who are already disadvantaged to participate in the 'Big Society' or to benefit from it.

Potential impact

- **More unemployment, poverty, homelessness, insecurity, conflict**
- **Women set to lose more jobs and do more unpaid work**
- **Accumulation of risks for those already poor and powerless; families with children hardest hit**
- **Loss of ‘peripheral’ public services**
- **Hard-pressed local organisations will bear a bigger burden in poor areas.**



Civil society and big business



Impact on 'civil society' organisations

Forced voluntarism, marketisation, competition, mergers and growth; inadequate support, shrinking resources... what about diversity, spontaneity and 'gift relationship'?

Role of business

Big businesses are well-placed to take over state functions and provide high-volume services ... how much room will they leave for small, community-based organisations?

Role of the state?

‘Big Society’, small state

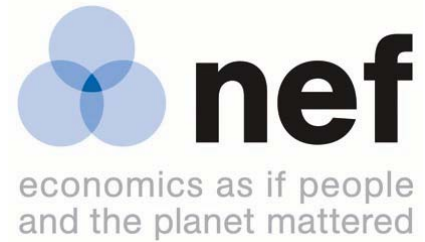
We need a state that is strong enough to

- protect the rights of individuals,
- protect the weak against the strong
- guarantee access to essential services
- provide support for local groups
- ensure fair distribution of resources.

Accountability

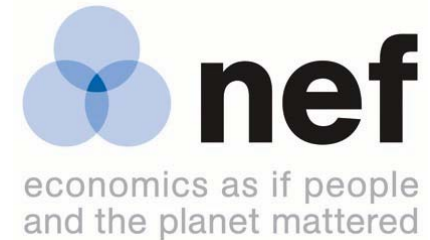
What happens when things go wrong... how
can anyone judge how well it's working...
where does the buck stop?

Another 'cones hotline' or a real watershed?



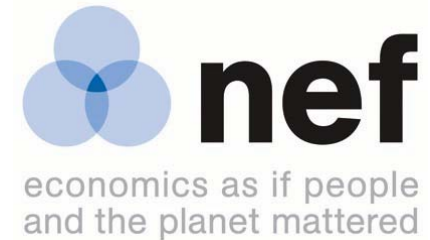
- The 'big society' story makes the scale and speed of deficit reduction politically feasible and
- it's high time for public service reform *but*
- the cuts make it impossible to realise the best ideals of the 'big society'
- 'U-turns' are in season and there are
- strong vested interests in the status quo

Making the best of it



- **Establish clear goals: social justice, well-being for all**
- **Tackle underlying causes of inequalities so that everyone has a fair chance to participate and benefit**
- **Make sure there is enduring, adequate support for community-based organisations**
- **Establish clear lines of accountability**
- **Move towards a fairer distribution of paid and unpaid time**
- **Invest in ‘upstream’ interventions to improve well-being and save unnecessary expenditure.**

The key to 'flourishing'



- We can grow the 'core economy'
- by recognising, valuing and nurturing abundant human resources
 - such as time, energy, wisdom, experience, knowledge, skills; love, empathy, watchfulness, teaching, learning
- and making more and better use of them to meet shared needs.
- We can do this by making co-production the standard way of getting things done.

Key features of co-production ...

- Equal partnership
- Recognising people as assets
- Building on people's existing capabilities
- Promoting mutual aid and reciprocity
- Developing peer support networks
- Breaking down barriers between professionals and recipients
- Facilitating rather than delivering



It's much more than...

- **consultation**
- **volunteering**
- **personalisation**

It can help to ...

- **strengthen social networks**
- **Improve well-being**
- **prevent needs arising**
- **transform public services and make them sustainable**



Future costs and benefits?

- Are the good ideas strong enough to prevail in spite of the cuts?
- How will the combined effects of the 'big society' and the cuts impact on current and future generations?
- What kind of welfare system will be fit for the challenges of the 21st century?
- If not the 'big society', then what?

For future research

- How are people in different neighbourhoods and income groups experiencing the combined impact of the cuts and the ‘big society’?
- What can be done to enable them to turn these changes to their advantage?
- Who are the winners and losers?
- What are the long-term effects?



...omics as if people
...e planet mattered



Cutting it
The 'Big Society' and the



21 hours

Why a shorter working week can help us all to flourish in the 21st century

Thank you!

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