**SOCIAL CAPITAL PROJECT – RESEARCH REVIEW**

**INTRODUCTION**

The term Social Capital has been in use for at least a century but it is only in the last twenty years or so that it has become familiar within the vocabulary of social scientists and politicians, much less so in the language of the general public even though the concept is of increasing relevance in today’s society. Its importance to academic analysts and government decision makers has grown largely as a result of the work of Robert Putnam whose thesis about the decline of social capital in America, as described in his book ‘Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community’ (Putnam 2000) has exercised a major influence on those who consider themselves in some way responsible for creating and maintaining a strong civil society within their respective nations, communities and institutions.

The promised benefits of social capital development have inspired social researchers across the globe to study their own and other societies in an attempt to find potential solutions to perceived socio-economic and cultural problems of poverty, deprivation and exclusion. The World Bank is one of the leading institutions to have participated in a number of major global projects affecting developing nations which have been struggling to achieve economic survival. In the UK the Office of National Statistics and the Performance Innovation Unit were among the first national organisations to research the topic of social capital and to advise the Government on the possible advantages of introducing social capital techniques into society as a way of tackling such issues as economic exclusion and educational underachievement as well as helping to reduce crime levels and antisocial behaviour.

The role of the state in the successful deployment of social capital is a contested one however. There is no consensus even in the academic world as to social capital’s benefits and shortfalls and it has proved to be an elusive concept which is difficult to measure. Nevertheless there is sufficient evidence of its value to prompt policy makers to introduce social capital techniques as a strategy to improve community cohesion, as the last UK Labour Government attempted to do and as the Coalition Government appear to be working towards with their proposals for a ‘big society’ to replace ‘big government’.

It is not clear however whether planned ‘top down’ state intervention or a more spontaneous ‘bottom up’ process will achieve the desired objective. Putnam clearly favoured the latter option but social capital theorists such as David Halpern, while cautious about some of the dangers of too much interference by the state and other institutions, believes that a ‘laissez-faire’ approach could lead to unfairness in social capital distribution and deepen existing structural inequality in British society (Halpern 2005) He is equally conscious about the risk of encouraging the formation of ‘bridging’ social capital connections at the expense of ‘bonding’ links advocating a balanced ‘vitamin’ model for social health (Halpern 2005:35). The importance of ‘bonding’ social capital particularly within families, schools and neighbourhood networks was emphasised by James Coleman, a social theorist whose research in schools demonstrated the value of increasing this form of social capital in raising educational achievement and reducing crime in adolescents as a result of the norms and sanctions, leading to social control, that could be applied by use of these techniques (Coleman 1988; 1994)

The background of a steadily worsening economic climate over the past five years both globally and in the UK has given added force to ongoing political debate about the country’s social problems which despite the rhetoric displayed in oppositional statements by the two Governments over the period in question have arguably been deepening over a much longer time frame. As research into the recent civil disorder has already indicated, most of those accused of ‘criminal’ behaviour have come from the 20% most economically and socially deprived areas of the country and while concerns have been generally expressed about the ‘materialistic greed’ of those charged with looting, thoughtful social commentators including members of the wider public have pointed out that this behaviour reflects the current ethos of a selfish and individualistic society which has somehow along the way failed in its collective social responsibility to socialise young people in acceptable beliefs and attitudes including, most importantly, a respect for others. The combination of growing structural inequity and selfish individualism may well lead to British society being stigmatised as ‘broken Britain’ and undermine the efforts being made in many quarters to improve people’s lives by helping them to reconnect with their communities and mainstream society.

It is contended that the increase of social capital in society can be a productive way to achieve greater social inclusion and in particular improve the lives of the poorest and most marginalised in the country. Certainly the former Labour Government seemed confident that the deployment of social capital techniques, particularly ‘bridging’, would be a fruitful way of bringing communities together. The Coalition has yet to demonstrate their commitment to social capital as a way of improving people’s lives however the principles of ‘Big Society’ thinking suggest that this Government too aspires to a better society, even if their means of attaining this objective follow a somewhat different path.

It is in this context that the research review is seeking to enquire into the place, role and significance of social capital as demonstrated in the policies and statements of the Labour and Coalition Governments over the last decade. Two specific areas of policy have been studied – the community cohesion strategy adopted by the Labour Government following the ‘race riots’ which took place in Bradford, Oldham and Burnley in the north of England in the spring/summer of 2001 and the ‘Big Society’ concept and associated proposals on public sector reform introduced by the Coalition Government from the date of their access to power in May 2010 culminating in the recent ‘riots’ of August 2011. The research review is part of an overall project which also focuses on a scoping study based on a medium-sized city in the south of England. This empirical study is intended to examine the extent of collaborative participation by inter-faith groups in social innovation projects within the city and to compare what is happening ‘on the ground’ with previously stated government policy objectives and commitments concerning inter-faith representation at central, regional and operational levels with particular regard to joint service provision in areas such as welfare for the marginalised and hard-to reach members of society.

Both parts of the project are to be carried out separately. The research review is a qualitative study which involves the examination of a total of around 45 documents, reports and speeches using a critical and analytical approach while maintaining as far as possible a neutral political stance. The first section of the report addresses social capital theory in order to set the scene by describing the meaning of the term as well as its application in practice. The three main proponents of social capital theory are identified as Pierre Bourdeau, James Coleman and Robert Putnam and their different approaches to the concept are discussed and compared, including references to some of their more critical reviewers. Both positive and negative aspects of the social capital concept are also addressed for example the problems that have been encountered with accurate measurement and the ‘bonding’ versus ‘bridging’ debate. In selectively examining key literatures the contribution made by independent advisory bodies such as the Office of National Statistics and the Performance Innovation Unit are included as they are regarded as potential influencers of government policy, particularly in relation to the Labour Government strategy on community cohesion.

The second section of the research review addresses the impact of social capital theory on the Labour Government’s community cohesion strategy covering the period from the summer of 2001 to the 2010 election. 25 documents are scrutinised and evaluated, including speeches made by Tony Blair and Gordon Brown as well as leading government ministers. The documents have been selected on the basis of their perceived relevance to the subject of community cohesion, a topic so important to the Labour Government that a special Community Cohesion Unit was set up and operated throughout the period under investigation.

The third section of the research review covers the period of Coalition Government although David Cameron’s speech as Opposition Leader prior to the election has been included as it is particularly relevant to his view of the Big Society, a theme which is subsequently endorsed by the Coalition and reinforced for some time thereafter. There are 19 relevant documents selected although many of these are speeches, usually by David Cameron. Despite their relatively short time in office the Coalition produced a number of key reports in the latter half of 2010 most of which outline their proposals for local reform in the context of achieving the Big Society objective. The last three speeches examined refer to the reactions of David Cameron and Nick Clegg to the civil disorder which took place in August 2011.

The fourth section of the research review provides a summary of the findings which have been detailed in sections 2 and 3 together with evaluative commentary and a conclusion. In commenting on the findings, comparison is made between the respective approaches of the two Governments towards social capital theory with a definite conclusion reached as to its significance in formulating their community strategies. The attitudes and approach to the use of social capital techniques by the two Governments are also related to the various perspectives on social capital theory discussed in section 1 and an assessment is provided as to the success or otherwise of their policies in this regard.

In summary this research review will demonstrate, by examining documents, reports, statements and transcripts of speeches produced by the former Labour and current Coalition Governments over the period 2001 to 2011, the significance of social capital theory in formulating their community strategies. In order to properly evaluate these findings a survey of the relevant literature will first be conducted and a selected range of key academic viewpoints discussed. The review will also set the framework for an empirical study to be carried out which will compare the extent to which ‘social capital’ projects already taking place ‘on the ground’ in a medium size city correspond with both theoretical perspectives and previously declared Government policies.

**SECTION 1 SOCIAL CAPITAL THEORY**

**1 Introduction**

A key part of this study is to examine the significance of social capital theory in the context of the previous Labour Government’s various strategies to introduce ‘community cohesion’ to the United Kingdom in particular following a series of disturbances in three cities in northern England which took place during the spring and summer of 2001 and involved violent clashes predominantly between groups of Asian and White youth. However it is also intended to explore the contribution which the concept of social capital may have made to the thinking of the present Coalition Government and especially the Prime Minister’s apparent enthusiasm for the idea of a ‘Big Society’, a notion which could be interpreted as an endorsement of some of the main elements of social capital theory as suggested by its most notable proponents, for example Robert Putnam (Putnam 2000)

Before investigating these influences in greater depth in following sections of this research review, it is proposed that an overview of social capital theory be carried out in order to provide some useful context and prepare for the more thorough examination of its potential meaning and significance to UK Governments over the past fifteen years or so. However, because of the diversity of meaning and application of the concept of social capital such a survey will perforce be selective so as to maintain relevance to the proposed study and to avoid undue complexity in terms of description and interpretation as well as explanation.

Despite this caveat the overview will encompass the most important aspects of social capital theory including its various definitions and meaning applications; key social capital theorists and their approaches; critiques from a number of perspectives and academic disciplines; the negative or ‘dark side’ of social capital; some of the multiple uses of which social capital theory has been made or for which it is potentially available and existing empirical evidence of its application in for example the United States and the United Kingdom.

There will also be some discussion about the use of social capital as a way of measuring positive social outcomes at the micro, meso and macro level and the difficulties that have been encountered by social scientists in establishing to what extent the concept can be said to possess tautology of meaning in that it can be interpreted both as means and outcome. In this respect the concept of social capital will also be examined for its potential usefulness as a heuristic device, given that its perceived deficiencies for social scientific measurement render it vulnerable to the criticism that it is of negligible value to those disciplines, such as economics and social and political theory, in relation to which positive claims about its vast potential have been made by key proponents of social capital theory over the years.

However in the first instance this review will explore some of the definitions that have been used to describe social capital and its principal characteristics focusing on three of the most influential social capital exponents: Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman and Robert Putnam.

* 1. **What is social capital?**

The term social capital has been in use for nearly a century (Gilchrist 2004:4 but see also Farr 2004**)** although the concept has changed somewhat over time and is currently perceived in some quarters as being so flexible in meaning that its application has lost much of its value (Edwards and Foley 1998; Portes 1998; Fine and Green 2000; Maloney et al. 2000; Schuller et al 2000; van Deth 2002; Field 2003). Nevertheless over the last decade it has been popularised among policy makers as well as social science theorists mainly through the work of Robert Putnam whose seminal book ‘Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community’ brought to the fore some of the fears about the decline of community in a modern western democracy and the likely impact of the deterioration of traditional social networks on society at large (Putnam 2000) Although Putnam was building on earlier work on social capital which compared civic institutions in northern and southern Italy (Putnam 1993) ‘Bowling Alone’ achieved a ‘breakthrough’ status which mobilised other nations to examine whether similar problems had developed in their own communities leading in turn to a plethora of literature on the subject in Europe and elsewhere and involving detailed analysis both quantitative and qualitative in an attempt to match the wealth of empirical evidence contained in the American study.

**1.2**. In view of the perceived influence of Putnam’s work and the enthusiasm with which the UK Government of the time appeared to regard his interpretation of the concept of social capital - as evidenced for example by their subsequent attempts to incorporate some of the main principles into their various strategies for ‘community cohesion’ - it is worth examining, albeit fairly briefly, some of the possible reasons for its sudden and widespread popularity. It may also be enlightening to review the perspectives of two other key thinkers whose theories about social capital have made a significant contribution to its contemporary relevance in society (Schuller et al 2000; Field 2003; Gilchrist 2004; Franklin et al 2007). In terms of definitions of the concept therefore, it is likely that a comparison between Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam will provide a useful insight into their differences of approach as well as revealing what their perceptions of social capital have in common.

**1.3** Bourdieu’s interest in the concept of social capital formed part of his overall theory concerning inequality of access by different social groups to the power and resources normally acquired and retained by the wealthy and privileged elite at the expense of the less economically advantaged (Bourdieu 1984; 1986; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) Although mostly preoccupied with cultural and economic capital, he defined social capital as ‘**the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively owned capital, a “credential” which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word.’ (**Bourdieu 1986:51 see also Bourdieu & Wacquant definition 1992: 119) Bourdieu’s use of the word ‘capital’ was deliberate in that he regarded both cultural and social resources as assets which could be accumulated and invested in on a similar basis as economic or financial capital. He also saw social capital as requiring an ‘unceasing effort of sociability’ (Bourdieu 1986:250) in order to sustain ‘a capital of social connections, honourability and respectability....’ In other words, in order to reap the benefits of social capital, continual effort was needed not only to acquire but also to maintain social connections the overall value of which depended on the amount of economic, social and cultural capital of each associate (Field 2003:17)

**1.4** Bourdieu’s adoption of the term social capital as an asset was a distinctive adaptation within his own social theory regarding the reproduction of power and privilege, but it was not the first time it had been used in this way. The concept of human capital as a resource in business and analogous to physical capital, had been current since the 1960s as the idea of investing in the education and skills of the labour force became a key focus for employers who were encouraged to regard their employees as an economic asset rather than a liability. James Coleman, an American sociologist who was influenced by the work of economist Gary Becker on human capital attempted to pursue the notion of social capital as a resource within the context of Rational Choice Theory (Coleman 1988; 1994) He believed social capital was particularly important for child development and defined it as **‘the set of resources that inhere in family relations and in community social organisation and that are useful for the cognitive or social development of a child or young person’**( Coleman 1994:300 cited in Field 2003:24)He also asserted that social capital in child development was represented by **‘the norms, the social networks, and the relationships between adults and children that are of value for the child’s growing up’** In Coleman’s view social capital **‘exists within the family, but also outside the family, in the community’** (Ibid)

**1.5** It is clear that Coleman’s view of social capital has a much wider application than that of Bourdieu with potential benefits for all, not only the more privileged in society, and also with special relevance for young people during the period of their socialisation. Nevertheless Bourdieu’s interest in the ‘cultural capital’ transmitted or invested by the family during early domestic education, thus providing a ‘head start’ for the more privileged prior to formal schooling indicates some overlap between his interpretation of cultural capital and Coleman’s notion of social capital, despite the fact that the two theorists, both writing at the same time were working from otherwise quite different perspectives ( Bourdieu 1986:48; Coleman 1988:S109- S111)Like Bourdieu Coleman saw social capital as a desirable acquisition with almost wholly positive effects, at least for those who were able to access it. There was however now a focus on the contribution of such factors as social networks and norms as well as trust and reciprocity. Bourdieu had not ignored the part played by reciprocity in building social relationships, however this was perceived in a more instrumental way, with gift exchanges acting as an investment leading to future returns (Bourdieu 1986:253) For Coleman however the trust created by the reciprocal obligations established in social networks and the accompanying norms and sanctions imposed on group members were deemed to be of more fundamental importance as were the formation of close ties within a community, a form of bonding which he believed was crucial, particularly for the development of young people( Coleman 1994) The focus on ‘bonding’ social capital was a key feature of Coleman’s thinking and he was less convinced by the benefits of looser ‘bridging’ ties – a form of social capital which was further elaborated on by Putnam and others and which has been taken up for example by policy makers in the UK as a possible solution to the perceived negative effects of too much ‘bonding’ in certain close communities (see for example McGhee 2010)

**1.6** In his introduction to ‘Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community’ Putnam acknowledges the origin of his use of the term social capital as belonging to L.J.Hanifan an educator writing in 1916 who referred to ‘...those tangible substances {that} count for most in the daily lives of people: namely good will, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse among the individuals and families who make up a social unit...’ (Hanifan cited in Putnam 2000:19) Travelling through the 20th century via a number of sociological writers he alights on Coleman as having definitively resurrected the term in its original social context with an emphasis on education (Putnam 2000:20) Indeed his own interpretation of social capital draws on the already familiar characteristics of reciprocity (particularly generalised reciprocity) and trust/trustworthiness operating within ‘dense networks of social interaction’ (Putnam 2000:21) Nevertheless Putnam recognises the contribution made by ‘bridging’ social capital as well as the ‘sociological superglue’ of bonding ties suggesting that the former is more valuable for creating broader links with people in different social circles who may be acquaintances rather than close friends but who can provide access to wider opportunities and information (Putnam 2000:22-23)

**1.7** Although Putnam does distinguish between the two principal dimensions of ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ social capital and addresses their various strengths and shortcomings he nevertheless does not manage to resolve the sociological dilemma as to which form is on the whole best for society at large. He puts forward no real solution as to what ‘recipe’ or combination of ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ is best for a community except to comment that a judicious mixture of the two is probably to be preferred but this depends on circumstances and is not amenable to measurement (Putnam 2000:23-24) Putnam himself openly acknowledges this failure to reconcile this dichotomy and admits that the two forms of social capital may to some extent be incompatible (Ibid) If such is the case there are potential consequences for policy-makers who have eagerly taken on board the notion that too much ‘bonding’ social capital can be bad for a community and that the only way forward for dealing with ‘troubled’ communities is to create a more extensive network of ‘bridging’ ties.

**1.8** There has been much follow-up debate on the nature and characteristics of social capital as delineated by the major theorists with further thinking and on the whole constructive criticism about whether and how it can be applied and particularly on ways it can be made operational ‘on the ground’. Putnam’s thesis has attracted the most attention but some reviewers have also focused on the ideas of Bourdieu or Coleman, considering their conceptualisation of social capital theoretically more meaningful as well as scientifically credible (Portes 1998; Siisiainen 2000; Svendsen and Svendsen 2003; Arneil 2007; Holland 2007) For example Maloney et al suggest that Coleman’s idea of social capital ‘seeks to explain a wider field of actions’ than does that of Putnam, who focuses specifically on ‘democratic values and attitudes’ (Maloney et al. 2000:214) Before examining some of these critiques in further detail however it is perhaps worth investigating other responses to Putnam’s main work, the impact of which very quickly spread to Europe prompting similar analyses of social capital in several countries including France, Germany and the UK (see for example Worms; Offe and Fuchs; Hall 2002) In addition there was follow-up commentary by Robert Wuthnow on the situation in the United States and a subsequent exploration by Putnam and Feldstein of a number of case studies which described social capital ‘success stories’ covering the period when social capital was in general said to be in decline ( Wuthnow 2002; Putnam and Feldstein 2003)

**1.9** In his follow-up review of Putnam’s explanation for social capital decline in America, Wuthnow refers to the key indicators of trust, volunteering, membership of associations and civic participation (Wuthnow 2002:59) In particular he warns of the potential for the growing inequality of social capital distribution over time and the exclusionary features of certain social networks where membership criteria can deter or even prevent some people from being admitted (Wuthnow 2002:79) Echoing Bourdieu he calls for resources to help build up people’s cultural capital so that they can acquire leadership skills and become familiar with an organisation’s rules and social protocols (Wuthnow 2002:80) He emphasises the structural nature of social capital inequalities and its relative lack of access for disadvantaged groups, for example the lower trust levels among black Americans and those with less education may deprive them of the benefits allegedly to be gained from the ‘generalised reciprocity’ which Putnam features as a key characteristic of close social networks. Wuthnow concludes by recommending that more is done to build bridging links between the privileged and the marginalised by providing the necessary resources for them to overcome ‘barriers to entry’ to desired organisations (Wuthnow 2002:102) This has particular resonance for well-intentioned policy-makers who wish to integrate communities in areas of economic and cultural disadvantage. In Bourdieu’s terms a ‘level playing field’ may not naturally exist so attempts must therefore be made to create one as a prerequisite for a successful ‘bridging’ strategy (see Szreter 2002:12)

**1.10** The issue of asymmetrical distribution of social capital has also been pursued by Hall and othersin their investigation of the position in the UK, which followed on Putnam’s account of the decline of traditional social networks in America (Hall 1999; 2002:21-57; Li, Savage and Pickles 2003; Savage, Li and Tampubolon 2007) Hall suggested that the lower levels of civic engagement in Britain were more due to a class effect than a generational effect as had been found in America although he acknowledged that social trust had lessened overall between 1960 and 1990 (Hall 2002:32) His review of the social changes that had taken place in the UK over the period in question led however to the conclusion that social capital in general, as defined by the number and level of voluntary and associative networks still existing, was proving ‘resilient.’ He attributed this success to a major post-war expansion of the education system; changes in the class structure leading to a considerable increase in the ‘middle’ or professional classes and the enduring commitment of successive British governments to ‘encourage and sustain’ financially as well as by other means the involvement of the voluntary sector in a wide range of state activity, for example the social services (Hall 2002:35) The resilience of social capital in the UK defined by the level and number of associative networks and the role of the public authorities in giving financial support to voluntary organisations is also confirmed by a 1998 study carried out in a major English city where it was found that the number of voluntary associations had actually increased by a third over the previous three decades (Maloney et al. 2000:219) However later studies by for example Savage et al claimed that Hall had been too optimistic in certain respects in that there had been a disproportionate decline in the traditional associations affecting mainly the young, the working class and male members of the population which had ‘skewed’ the overall picture of social capital decline in the UK since the 1970s (Li, Savage and Pickles 2003; Savage, Li and Tampubolon 2007)

**1.11** Nevertheless Hall’s analysis, in referring to the flourishing nature of the voluntary sector and the increased middle class involvement, did in fact acknowledge a growing gap between social groups in their access to social capital citing as examples the decline of trade union membership and the numbers of traditional social clubs which were important venues for associative activities among the residual working class groups ( Hall 2002:38) In terms once again reminiscent of Bourdieu he underlined the inbuilt privileges of the (albeit now larger) middle class sections of the community whose wider and more varied access to social networks provided them with correspondingly extensive and diverse social links, in other words ‘bridging’ social capital which was not available to the less economically advantaged groups who were at the same time losing some of their ‘bonding’ connections with the demise of their traditional associative ties (Hall 2002:38-39) In sum Hall concluded that while total levels of social capital and political engagement were still high in the UK there was an uneven distribution of these characteristics across the population favouring the middle class and middle aged and marginalising the working class and the young (Hall 2002:53)

**1.12** Despite some of the alleged differences between the UK and the US, Hall, like other European social commentators also acknowledged some of the influences brought about by the major social changes affecting western society as a whole such as the impact of television on traditional social and leisure pursuits, the increased participation of women in the labour force and the trend towards more individualistic and self-absorbed lifestyles in contrast to the collectivism of post-war solidarity particularly evident up to the 1960s, all of which Putnam also remarked upon in his American study. In Hall’s account there is some ambiguity about the impact of generational change in the UK, a factor clearly indicted in Putnam’s work (Putnam 2000). Nevertheless the important role of national Governments in facilitating the growth of social capital at various levels of society is highlighted by both writers. This is seen by Hall in particular as a key factor in the continuing success and survival of high levels of social capital in the UK (Hall 2002:42)

**1.13** **Some critiques of social capital and its meanings and applications**

Up to now this review of some of the meanings and applications of social capital has focused on definitions created by key proponents of the term and has considered ways in which they have been interpreted by not only the theorists themselves but other commentators drawing on the same or similar criteria. Significant themes such as the importance of social networks, the relative values of ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ ties and the contribution of social trust, norms and reciprocity have emerged and been assumed to play an essential role in producing high levels of social capital on the basis that this is of itself ‘a good thing’. However a number of questions may be begged here, not the least of which is the desirability of social capital as an objective, whether as a means to achieving a ‘good’ society or an end to which a well-intentioned society should be working for its own sake. Even Robert Putnam, from whom the meaning of social capital has to be extracted mainly by an inductive process from the mass of empirical evidence that he draws upon to explain its shortfall in contemporary American society, has apparently started from the premise that social capital is a positive outcome for all societies, although he does acknowledge to a limited extent the existence of a ‘dark side’ (Putnam 2000:350-363)

**1.14** Such assumptions have also been incorporated into some of the official literature written on the subject of social capital. For example the Performance and Innovation Unit (PIU) in the UK, reporting on discussions about social capital at an international seminar held in March 2002 drew extensively on commentary and statistics from the World Bank, OECD, the World Values Survey and various UK data sources such as the British Social Attitudes Survey of 1998 and a MORI Poll of 2001 in defining the meaning of social capital and explaining its actual and potential impact on the UK (Aldridge and Halpern 2002) Again the views expressed appeared to take on board the approach of Putnam and his adherents. However the PIU in its paper identified a third form of social capital i.e ‘linking’ based on Woolcock’s recognition of social ties which described those connections formed between persons or groups possessing unequal levels of power and status (Aldridge et al. 2002:12 but see also Woolcock 1998; Portes 1998; Szreter 2000; 2002)This distinction, not separated out clearly in Putnam’s thesis, is of particular significance for those policy–makers who perceive a need to build social capital between for example governing or administrative agencies and groups of people with different levels of economic and cultural capital.

**1.15** For some reviewers the inclusion of the word ‘capital’ in the term ‘social capital’ is charged with Bourdieu’s underlying interpretation concerning the power differentials between groups with greater or lesser social advantage (Portes 1998;Schuller et al 2000:4) Bourdieu’s contention that ‘Capital is accumulated labor...’ and that ‘capital in all its forms and not solely in the one form recognised by economic theory’ helps to explain ‘the functioning of the social world’ and its unequal distribution of economic, cultural and social benefits in society is reflected in the views of a number of social theorists who feel that the themes of conflict and social struggle have not been sufficiently addressed in the conceptual accounts of Putnam or Coleman (Bourdieu 1986:46; Portes 1998; Siisiainen 2000; Szreter 2002; Svendsen and Svendsen 2003; Farr 2004;)However as a metaphor transposed into social theory from the discipline of economics, the concept of social capital has also attracted much analytical critique from economic and political scientists who are somewhat sceptical of its too general application as well as its empirical and operational value (Portes 1998; Schuller et al. 2000; Fine and Green 2000; Maloney et al. 2000; van Deth 2002;) The problem of accurate measurement of social capital has also been raised with some questioning the methodology used by Putnam who for example on the one hand determines levels of social trust by relying on surveys where people are asked to provide subjective opinions to single straightforward questions while on the other hand drawing on existing statistical sources regarding the number of associations and memberships to assess the changing levels of social, civic and political engagement (Schuller et al. 2000:27)

**1.16** Despite these concerns other researchers in the UK have found social capital to be a useful analytical technique for carrying out local community development projects (Macgillivray and Walker 2000:197-211) while the concept has also proved helpful in thinking about ways in which social capital can best be created and deployed (Schuller et al. 2000:32; Brown and Lauder 2000; Szreter 2000; Harper 2001; Aldridge and Halpern 2002; Field 2003; Gilchrist 2004) With the descriptions of the Groundwork community projects, carried out within the Barclays Sitesavers programme and involving local residents in various environmental and regeneration ventures to transform derelict land, Macgillivray and Walker’s conclusions about the positive outcome of the scheme parallel similar success stories of social capital projects reported by Putnam in his collaborative follow-up work ‘Better Together: Restoring the American Community’. These practical examples of social capital in action ‘on the ground’ demonstrate vividly what has been claimed as the ‘heuristic’ power of the concept (Edwards and Foley 1998; Macgillivray and Walker 2000:197-211; Putnam and Feldstein 2003)

**1.17** At the same time, while debates were continuing amongst the various academic disciplines about the difficulties of achieving a precise and accurate measurement of the social capital ‘product’, Hall, the PIU and the ONSfor example felt able to draw extensively on existing statistics and surveys for the purpose not only of reviewing and interpreting the UK’s social capital position but also of making fairly confident recommendations concerning how this could be improved and the potential benefits to be gained thereby (Hall 1999; Harper 2001;Aldridge and Halpern 2002;)

In this context it is worthy of note that the seminar in March 2002 on which the PIU discussion paper on social capital was based was attended inter alia by the then Home Secretary David Blunkett, at a time when the question of community cohesion was high on the UK Government’s agenda. It is not unlikely therefore that these discussions had some impact on the thinking of New Labour and later sections of this research review will be investigating in greater detail ways in which the Government of the day attempted to adapt the concept of social capital theory to the UK circumstances and in particular to introduce an improved ratio of ‘bridging’ to ‘bonding’ within ‘troubled’ communities. As already mentioned however many social scientists were already concerned about the seemingly unalloyed enthusiasm for social capital as a ‘cure all’ and it is therefore worth looking at the so-called ‘dark side’ or potentially negative aspects of social capital, a characteristic which has already been referred to earlier in this paper.

**1.18 Potential problems with social capital**

Portes in reviewing the literature on social capital has noted the major emphasis on its ‘positive consequences’ (Portes 1998:15) He points out that ‘it is our sociological bias to see good things emerging out of sociability...’ (Ibid) This predisposition can clearly be seen in the work of Putnam and Coleman. Bourdieu is more ambiguous. While it is true that he does not refer directly to negative aspects of social capital- indeed he stresses the positive benefits to those who are able to acquire and retain it- there is an implicit cynicism in his theoretical approach to the subject which allows the reader to infer what Bourdieu is taking for granted – the unequal distribution of social capital in an unequal society. The point about structural inequality has also been made by other commentators in the social capital debate, including as mentioned above Robert Wuthnow and Peter Hall in their follow-up evaluation of Putnam’s main thesis on American society (Putnam 2000; Hall 2002:Wuthnow2002)In addition Portes has identified from previous studies four other key negative consequences of ‘bonding‘ social capital: ...‘exclusion of outsiders, excess claims on group members, restrictions on individual freedoms, and downward levelling norms’. In similar fashion the PIU discussion paper referred to some of the ‘downside’ features of social capital including as examples of exclusiveness the operation of cartels and ‘club goods’ and the divisive nature of some close communities such as Northern Ireland (Aldridge and Halpern 2002:32-33) With regard to the desirability of moving from ‘bonding’ to ‘bridging’ social capital and the possibility of Government intervention to facilitate this it was however pointed out that historical and cultural factors would need to be taken into account before an effective government strategy could be put into place (Aldridge and Halpern 2002:53-54)

**1.19** The PIU references to the constraints of historical and cultural influences in building ‘bridging’ and ‘linking’ social capital between communities where excessive ‘bonding’ is perceived as a problem are a reminder that the structures of existing societies - indeed nations – have evolved over time and it may not therefore be practicable or even appropriate to attempt to apply a ‘one size fits all’ social capital solution to every situation. Putnam has himself been criticised for his approach in a number of ways including taking a view of the production of social capital as highly path-dependent by perceiving the decline of social capital in America as an outcome of several specific and long term historical processes (Kaufman 1999:370; Lynn and Stein 2000; Field 2003:39) In this he is seen to have underestimated the role of agency, including that of the state as well as political actors and institutions (Szreter 2002; Field 2003; Arneil 2007) Putnam himself refers to path-dependence in his follow-up work to ‘Bowling Alone’ pointing out that ‘where you can go and how to get there depend on which path brought you here.’ (Putnam and Feldstein 2003: 287) He appears to regard the successful building of social capital as necessarily a long and sometimes difficult process which can lead to ‘vicious’ as well as ‘virtuous’ circles depending on the levels of social capital one starts out with (Putnam and Feldstein 2003:287) Nevertheless such ‘path-dependent arguments’ are perceived by Kaufman for example as ‘indistinguishable from simple historical description’ (Kaufman 1999:370) while Field expresses some surprise at Putnam’s ‘oversocialised view of behaviour’ which seems to leave little scope for human agency (Field 2003:39) Equally significant in the view of these and other commentators is the omission of the role of the state and other key institutions whether as instruments of intervention or as dialectical partners in the processes of social capital building amongst their citizens.

Despite these caveats many of Putnam’s arguments are on the whole convincing and persuasive and several of the contributory factors he attributes to social capital decline in the US can be intuitively applied in the UK. There is however a need for caution in interpreting some of his conclusions. One may take as an example the case of generational change the process of which Putnam believes has been a major cause of the failure of traditional social networks, reduction in civic and political activism and fall in social trust. Such processes have also been observed in the UK with similar generational changes and the movement from post-war solidarity and collectivism to a more individualistic society. However Hall for example has suggested that there is no real evidence to show an overall decline in voluntary or associative activity in the UK nor has he detected the generational effects found in the US. He is however concerned to point out the unequal effects of the changes in social capital arising from the better access to social networks and the greater participation of the predominantly middle class and middle aged compared to the working class and younger sections of the population whose opportunities for links with the wider community have been lost to a large extent through economic disadvantage and the decline of traditional social networks. In addition Szreter has pointed out that America’s ‘civic’ generation commended by Putnam as contributing so substantially to levels of social capital before the 1960s were themselves indebted to the previous generation of ‘Progressive’ reformers who had created the social and economic and political environment which allowed associative activity to flourish so successfully (Szreter 2002:24-25)

**1.20 Concluding comments**

As a concept social capital has been criticised as ‘under-theorised and oversimplified’ (Maloney et al. 2000:214). At the same time it has been perceived as having serious limitations in its application, for example it does not allow for the power inequalities and conflicts inherent in civil society (Ibid). Its meaning and application has become so diverse and pluralistic as to lose most of its value (Portes 1998:2) while it fails as an analytical tool because it is difficult and complex to measure with adequate precision (Fine and Green 2000:90). However, despite Portes’ reservations about the severe challenges being faced by social capital’s heuristic value (Portes 1998:2) key opponents of the concept Edwards and Foley have nevertheless said that ‘the heuristic value of the social capital concept in recent debate has lain in its calling attention to crucial aspects of social relations that impinge on economic and political life and that are neither easily or convincingly incorporated into an explanatory model based on the rational pursuit of individual self-interest’ (Edwards and Foley 1998;126 cited in Schuller et al. 2000:38) In other words there is a place for social capital as a way of thinking about the social world which is not necessarily catered for as part of the stricter scientific research methodology normally associated with the mainstream social science disciplines.

**1.21** This brief overview of social capital theory has attempted to provide a balanced picture, albeit selective, of the current thinking about a concept which has been a topic of sociological interest for at least half a century, but has only recently within the last decade reached the wider public consciousness, mainly as a result of Putnam’s seminal study on the decline of social capital in America (Putnam 2000) Three key theorists of social capital have been reviewed together with commentary from sociological, economic and political scientists covering both positive and critical standpoints. Irrespective of the many critiques that Putnam may have attracted, the issue of social capital has now been firmly placed centre stage in the thinking of academics, researchers and policy-makers, while new light has been thrown on the work of other social capital theorists such as Bourdieu and Coleman. In particular the heuristic benefits of the social capital concept have, through its deficiencies as well as its merits, focused attention on some of the more challenging social problems in contemporary society. In the UK the previous Labour Government attempted to ‘pick up and run’ with the challenge. The next section of this research review paper will examine in depth how they planned to adopt and adapt the concept of social capital for the benefit UK society during the period of their administration from 1997–2010.

END OF SECTION 1

**SECTION 2**

**SOCIAL CAPITAL AND THE LABOUR GOVERNMENT**

**Introduction**

**2.1** This section begins the task of examining social capital theory in the context of the Labour Government’s strategic thinking about community cohesion and integration as it evolved over the decade leading up to the General Election in 2010. Although Robert Putnam’s work on social capital had been in the mainstream academic domain from the early 1990s (Putnam 1993; 1995) it is probably safe to assume that his most well-known book ‘Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community’ published in 2000 exerted the greatest influence on the public mind and provided an impetus for national policy initiatives regarding social capital to be considered not only in the USA, the principal focus of Putnam’s concerns, but also throughout the liberal democratic world.

It is however likely that Prime Minister Tony Blair who headed the newly elected Labour Government from 1997 was already well aware of the concept of social capital from the outset of his leadership term and he was undoubtedly in sympathy with its perceived principles and aims which appeared to be closely aligned to the Government’s ‘third way’ approach. In a keynote speech to the NCVO in 1999 he pointed out **“We have always said that human capital is at the core of the new economy. But increasingly it is also social capital that matters too – the capacity to get things done, to co-operate, - the magic ingredient that makes all the difference..........In the future we need to invest in social capital as surely as we invest in skills and buildings”** (cited in Halpern 2005:284)

Certainly this ‘magic ingredient that makes all the difference’ – a perception that might however be contested by many social theorists and certainly prescribed with caution – was to be espoused with some enthusiasm by the Labour Government and subsequently was to be seen as something of a panacea for the ‘ills’ that beset the country following the civic disturbances and rioting that took place in several UK northern towns in the spring/early summer of 2001, and shortly after a General Election which coincidentally fielded the ‘lowest turnout since 1918’ (Halpern 2005:214) The violence that erupted principally in the towns of Burnley and Oldham and the city of Bradford took place between groups of white and Asian youths and resulted in criminal damage and injury on both sides, fuelled by a number of circumstances which were later assessed to be mainly the consequence of a lack of ‘community cohesion’ and integration between the white communities and the black and minority ethnic communities of the areas affected. The move towards ‘Community cohesion’ and the eradication of racial inequalities thenceforward became key preoccupations for the Government over the next few years during which major events such as the terrorist attack on September 11th 2001 in the USA and the London bombings in July 2005 were to influence and modify their policy approaches to immigration control and national security. These in turn subtly but surely changed the emphasis concerning community cohesion and integration towards the importance of inculcating core ‘British’ values in immigrant populations, a more assimilative approach than had been adopted within the earlier strategy of attempting to provide a level playing field of equality between all community groups and to build capacity which would encourage and empower cooperative dialogue and collective action and problem solving between formerly divided communities which in reality possessed many civic, economic and social objectives in common.

In December 2006 Tony Blair gave a speech wherein the tone was considerably more robust and authoritarian than had been the case before, admittedly in the context of the London bombings which had taken place 18 months earlier. Here he spoke forcefully of the ‘duty to integrate’ stating that **‘Integration......is not about culture or lifestyle. It is about values. It is about integrating at the point of shared, common unifying British values. It isn’t about what defines us as people, but as citizens, the rights and duties that go with being a member of our society’** (Blair 2006:3) He went on to define these ‘essential’ values as ‘belief in democracy, the rule of law, tolerance, equal treatment for all, respect for this country and its shared heritage....’ and further asserted that **‘no distinctive culture or religion supersedes our duty to be part of an integrated United Kingdom’** (ibid)

In order to establish the significance of social capital theory in the Labour Government’s ‘community cohesion’ strategies it is intended to carry out a critical review of a selection of Labour Government and Labour Government commissioned reports and speeches from 2001 until the 2010 General Election before going on to examine the potential existence of social capital thinking in the policies of the Coalition Government for example in David Cameron’s ‘Big Society’ agenda. It is recognised that social capital theory will not always be expressed in explicit terms in Government policy documents and consequently a pragmatic approach has been adopted which will identify its implicit presence in for example references to ‘community cohesion’ and ‘integration’ as well as some of the more prominent social capital characteristics such as associational activity, civic trust, social networks, norms and sanctions, as promoted principally within Putnam’s definition of the concept. It is clear that Putnam’s interpretation of the theory was at least partially taken on board by the Labour Government during the period in question (see for example Blunkett 2004:5) In particular descriptions of or references to ‘bonding’ or ‘bridging’ social capital will be highlighted since one of the main concerns of the Labour Government in the formulation of its various ‘community cohesion’ strategies was to persuade voluntarily segregated communities to move away from excessive bonding to build more bridging ties in the cause of better integration.

**2.2 Methodology and context**

As mentioned in the foregoing sub-section the Labour Government were well aware of the emerging prominence not to say popularity of the ideas about social capital as promulgated mainly by Robert Putnam although academic researchers and policy advisers had been working on various aspects of the concept for much longer (see discussion in the first section of this research review) For example from 2001-2002 the Performance and Innovation Unit and the Office of National Statistics produced independent reports which provided comprehensive literature reviews on the topic and discussed a wide range of empirical research studies and projects/surveys that were ongoing or already had taken place in the UK including in their deliberations comparative statistics and other indices of measurement within this country and abroad (Harper 2001;Aldridge and Halpern 2002) The ONS document was prepared as a background briefing for a ‘cross-departmental social capital workshop’ which would involve most of the Government Departments (Harper 2001:22) The purpose of this was to provide a ‘forum for discussion on the definition and measurement of the [social capital] concept’ (ibid) In March 2002 a Cabinet Office sponsored seminar on the topic of social capital was attended inter alia by senior academics including Michael Woolcock who had originated the concept of ‘linking’ social capital (Woolcock 2001) As previously mentioned David Blunkett the then Home Secretary was a key participant. This seminar was followed up the next month by a Performance and Innovation discussion paper which made recommendations about policy applications of social capital in all key areas of Government responsibility. These discussion papers were evidently the outcome of long term research and investigation pre-dating the specific concerns which arose about lack of ‘community cohesion’ following the civic disturbances in spring/summer 2001.

**2.3** It is against this background of intense interest and activity surrounding the ideas about the social benefits of (particularly bridging) social capital, which were enthusiastically espoused by policy makers despite the confusion still associated with its definition and measurement, that this investigation into Labour Government strategies on community cohesion and integration from 2001 onwards is conducted. Approximately 25 key selected documents and associated speeches tracing the course of the Government’s deliberations on this issue will be carefully examined and analysed (a full list is attached as Appendix A) The main method will be critical discourse analysis and the approach qualitative rather than quantitative in that such interpretation, though subjective, is likely to convey greater relevance and meaning in the context of Government and Government related discourse than for example a simple content analysis would provide. The Government speeches will be interpreted from text transcripts although it is recognised that the auditory and visual aspects of such communication such as tone and body language is thereby lost. Additionally the act of transcription ‘imposes’ an interpretation on the speech which may move the reader a step further away from the original communicative intentions of the speaker (Fairclough 1992:229) Nevertheless the study of speech in transcript, particularly at some time after the event, can be perceived as avoiding some of the ‘emotional’ distraction that may have attended the original circumstances and allow for more objective focus on the content rather than the personality of the speaker. In the case of politicians and other high profile speechmakers many examples will doubtless come to mind.

**2.4** It is something of a paradox that the Labour Government’s approach to the application of social capital theory in the UK and in particular their emphasis on the importance of introducing mechanisms of ‘bridging’ as opposed to ‘bonding’ should differ so significantly from that of Putnam, whose philosophy, often criticised, rested substantially on ‘bottom-up’ spontaneous civic activity rather than ‘top-down’ or state intervention when attempting to encourage the rebuilding of social capital in America. The decision by the Labour Government to improve social capital in British society was brought about as a result of serious civic disturbances in towns and cities where there was considerable poverty and disadvantage and accompanying social exclusion as well as racial and ethnic disharmony. These circumstances prompted the Labour Government into a major interventionist project which could in retrospect appear somewhat heavy-handed. As a consequence the following examination of Government documents and Government commissioned documents and speeches will be taking careful account of the perceived ideological and power-laden undercurrents identified during the course of the investigation. In other words by adopting an interpretative approach to this exercise there will be an attempt to uncover some of the power mechanisms inherent in language which is often used to convey ideological messages and obtain consensus to the communicator’s goals and objectives. This is particularly relevant in the case of Government reports where the conventional wording of official documents can divert the lay reader from its underlying meaning and purpose.

**2.5** The first three documents to be examined are the independent reports submitted on behalf of the towns of Burnley and Oldham and the city of Bradford following civic disturbances which took place in the late spring /early summer of the year 2001 during a period when there was a General Election as well as a series of local elections throughout the country. These events were to precipitate the Labour Government into a whole series of reactive policy responses including the setting up of a number of investigative bodies not only to find out what had ‘gone wrong‘ in the communities affected but to formulate recommendations as to how matters could be remedied. These investigations led in turn to the Government’s resolve to improve ‘community cohesion’ and were therefore significant in contributing to the social capital discourse which followed.

**(a)Burnley Speaks, Who Listens.....? A Summary of the Burnley Task Force Report On the disturbances in June 2001**

**(b) One Oldham One Future: Oldham Independent Review Panel Report 11 December 2001**

**(c) Community Pride Not Prejudice: Making Diversity Work in Bradford – Bradford District Race Review (2001) Bradford Vision**

The above three reports were separately and locally commissioned each with an independent chair whose remit was to oversee and report on an investigation into the events surrounding the disturbances and the reasons for them by consulting widely with all interested parties, including most importantly, all members of the communities affected. The teams were also tasked with making recommendations which would address the perceived problems of the various communities with an emphasis on the views of the communities themselves. These independent and locally based reviews were carried out in parallel with the investigation of the Community Cohesion Review Team set up by the Government under the chairmanship of Ted Cantle to **‘obtain the views of local communities..........on the issues that need to be addressed in developing confident, active communities and social cohesion’** A further objective was to **‘identify good practice.......and also to identify weaknesses in the handling of these issues at local level’.** This report will be examined in more detail later on.

**2.6** The Burnley Task Force was established by the people of Burnley and therefore, it is claimed, carried out its remit differently from the other local review teams in drawing all its members from the town of Burnley, except for the independent Chair Tony Clarke (Burnley Task Force 2001:4) In consulting widely the Task Force ‘adopted a people-centred approach’ and took on board a number of key messages about dissatisfaction in the community including the poor quality of much of the housing; the ‘separate and parallel lives’ of the Asian and White communities regarding neighbourhoods, schools and workplaces; grievances about Council funding decisions; lack of ‘leadership, vision and civic pride’ in all quarters and ‘at all levels of society’ and concerns about biased media reporting and drug-related crime (Burnley Task Force 2001:7) A number of practical recommendations were put forward in all these areas of concern some of which specifically addressed the need to improve community relations for example the provision of ‘better information and communications’ about funding decisions; the tackling of ‘deeply entrenched’ racist views in schools and the promotion of ‘multi-cultural’ activities by youth organisations to encourage young people from different communities to ‘mix’

**2.7** However many of the recommendations were aimed at the problems of the local economy and the need for better regeneration strategies and most were specifically addressed to local policymakers and community leaders and agencies such as the police and media. A major conclusion was that Burnley was not a ‘riotous’ town and that the disturbances were mainly the result of ‘a series of criminal acts perpetrated by a relatively small number of people’ Emphasis was placed on the ‘high crime rates ....especially in inner Burnley’ and the fact that the town suffered from ‘all of the chronic problems associated with inner city deprivation’ (Burnley Task Force 2001:3) There was no special reference in this report to the need for better community cohesion or integration as such despite the fact that attention was drawn to the (mainly) voluntary self-segregation between the white and the black and minority ethnic communities caused by a number of factors including racial harassment and discrimination and resentments about the perceived unfairness concerning distribution of resources. Nevertheless although the construction of ‘bridging’ social capital was not consciously referred to in this report (or indeed in any of the local reports) it can be perceived as being a significant underlying factor in the investigative process as was made clear in a comment made by the Chair of the Oldham Independent Review Panel in the report to which we now turn.

**2.8 ‘As a panel we have probably done more listening to people’s views about community relations within Oldham than has been done for a long time’ (Oldham Independent Review 2001:4)** These words incorporated as part of the introductory remarks of the independent Chair David Ritchie reflect some of the major concerns emerging from the investigation into ‘the worst racially motivated riots in the UK for fifteen years’ (Oldham Independent Review 2001:2) The Oldham Independent Review was set up in June 2001 following a meeting between the Home Secretary and delegates from the town at which they were asked to set up an independent review to investigate what had happened and what could be done to remedy the situation. Again the report was principally addressed to the people of Oldham, while being formally submitted to the joint commissioning bodies of the relevant Council, the Police and the Police Authority. In examining issues of inter-community relations in Oldham the report’s conclusions covered ‘virtually every area of economic and social activity within the town’ (Oldham Independent Review 2001:3) Consultation was widely conducted and views sought from individuals and organisations across the whole community. Apart from the long term and deeply entrenched racism which had led inter alia to self-segregation between the indigenous white population and the black and minority ethnic communities the Review found instances of institutional racism and breaches of race legislation in the key public institutions including the Council and the Police and Health Authorities. Racial disharmony had also been further exacerbated by the activities of the BNP and similar far–right groups, the former of which had gained significant political recognition in Oldham constituencies in the recent General Election. The overall situation had also been compounded by weak political and community leadership.

**2.9** In similar fashion to the Burnley Task Force the Oldham Review gave due recognition to the extreme poverty and social disadvantage which existed in certain areas of the town noting that, although some wards were amongst the most affluent in the country, seven wards featured in the worst 10% for deprivation according to the Government’s Local Needs Index (Oldham Independent Review 2001:8) Recommendations concerning housing conditions; educational achievement and leisure, culture and community interaction were also given prominence. A particular focus was directed at the importance of children acquiring sufficient competence in the English Language so as not to hinder their educational progress and adversely affect their eventual employment prospects. The failure of many adults as well as children to learn English was found to be a major grievance within Oldham where in particular the white and African Caribbean people consulted expressed the view that **‘..English was the language of the town and of England as a whole, and was therefore the only language which should be used for the conduct of business, in official or unofficial documents emanating from public authorities, and in public institutions such as schools’** ( Oldham Independent Review 2001:28)This sentiment was highlighted in several places in the Oldham report and subsequently became an important feature of a number of Labour Government reports and speeches where in a slightly different context politicians took the opportunity to promote the learning of the English language as a ‘core’ requirement of becoming a British citizen.

**2.10** Nevertheless it should be noted that this recommendation within the Oldham report is one amongst many concentrating mainly on suggested improvements to help economically and socially disadvantaged communities to achieve greater equality by reducing racism as well as religious discrimination. This was to be achieved by more enlightened housing allocation policies, better cooperation between segregated schools as well as changes to admission policies and improved recruitment and training of black and ethnic minority members of the community into public sector employment. By this means it was hoped that racial barriers could be broken down and community relations fostered through increased contact and collective endeavour.

**2.11** Very similar problems can be detected in the report put forward in respect of the Bradford District where arguably the worst riots took place during the early summer of 2001. The report was commissioned by Bradford Vision, an organisation which had in the previous year launched the 2020 Vision, a ‘major regeneration initiative’ for the District (Bradford Vision 2001:1) Bradford Vision comprised representatives from all the principal groups in the area including the Council, the police and the health authority as well as local businesses, voluntary groups and faith communities (Bradford Vision 2001:1) The Bradford Race Review (BRR) which was independently chaired by Sir Herman Ouseley initially posed the question as to why, in a long established multicultural district such as Bradford, community breakdown had occurred on such a major scale along ‘social, cultural, ethnic and religious lines’(Ouseley 2001: BRR Foreword) The main terms of reference which the BRR team set themselves accordingly were to explore ways of improving race and community relations in the District by first and foremost tackling institutional racial discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity for all black and minority ethnic groups (Ouseley 2001:BRR Foreword) The focus of the investigation carried out by the review team was therefore to consult with individuals, groups and organisations across the District regarding their views and aspirations about creating or rather re-creating community pride and a sense of belonging. The team would also attempt to identify what steps were needed to break down the barriers between the different groups and eliminate the culture of ‘fear’ which had evolved owing to a reluctance to confront and talk ‘openly and honestly’ about issues that were of major concern to them such as crime, racial intolerance and lack of social and racial integration (BRR 2001:1)

**2.12** Working from a slightly different perspective from the Burnley and Oldham reports the review recalled the many achievements which it was felt Bradford could justifiably celebrate and identified a large number of community–led initiatives which ‘encourage social and multicultural interaction’ (BRR 2001:2) Like the other local reports much emphasis was placed on the importance of children and young people and the positive role they were expected to play in the future of the community. A proposed ‘People Programme’ would encompass such features as citizenship education in schools and a Centre for Diversity, Learning and Living. Equality measures would include the formulation of a behavioural competency framework for the workplace and the insertion of equality and diversity provisions in conditions of contracts supplying goods and services and other facilities such as partnership projects and programmes (BRR 2001:3) Again in similar fashion to the other local reports there was much concern expressed about segregation in schools and other factors which ‘cause conflict and lead to polarisation between individuals and communities on the grounds of race, culture and religion’ (BRR 2001:6) As was not unexpected the focus on racial inequalities and community segregation was much more prominent in the Bradford Race Review while the thinking regarding potential solutions was also highly developed and detailed given that Bradford Vision had specifically set these terms of reference for their review. Accordingly the social and economic issues were not specifically dwelt on nor were the recent Bradford ‘riots’ referred to as the report, submitted to Bradford Vision in July 2001, had been commissioned earlier in the year owing to previously existing concerns about the need to **‘achieve an end to racial discrimination, to promote equality of opportunity for all “racial groups” and to improve race and community relations for all Bradfordians’ (** Ouseley 2001: BRR Foreword) In other words Bradford Vision, in commissioning the ‘Bradford Race Review’ was already ‘on the case’

**2.13(a) T Cantle (2001) Community Cohesion: a report of the independent review team: Home Office**

**(b) J Denham (2002) Building Cohesive Communities: a report of the ministerial group on public order: HMSO**

(a)These reports were commissioned by the Government in response to the civic disturbances described above and reflected the serious concerns with which Labour viewed the signs of community breakdown between white and black and minority ethnic populations in the affected areas of the country. This was not the first time the UK had witnessed such scenes, however similar demographics were to be found in places such as Birmingham and Leicester which had not recently experienced the same disturbances and it was therefore part of the independent review team’s remit to look at both types of communities in order to examine ‘similarities and differences’ and to ‘focus on the lessons for national policy and practice’ (Cantle 2001:5). The team was not concerned with ‘covering the same ground’ as the separate and local enquiries for Burnley and Oldham which were being carried out in parallel nor with the report by Bradford Vision which, although commissioned prior to the Bradford ‘riots’ addressed similar issues and was submitted at around the same time (ibid)

The independent review team chaired by Ted Cantle was nominated by the commissioning Government body as the Community Cohesion Review Team and it is significant that the concept of ‘community cohesion’ was now being constructed through Cantle as the dominant discourse which would direct future government policies towards a cultural rather than structural response to events which had after all occurred in some of the most economically deprived areas in the country. Despite the fact that the local enquiries had revealed poverty, high levels of unemployment and social exclusion as potential reasons for grievance and unrest these factors were ‘glossed over’ by Cantle in favour of more cultural explanations of the disturbances, namely the voluntary segregation of different ethnic groups in the community and their failure to ‘get on’ with each other. In Cantle’s view many communities were operating **‘on the basis of a series of parallel lives’** which **‘often do not seem to touch at any point, let alone overlap and promote any meaningful interchanges’** (Cantle 2001:9).

This discourse of ‘community cohesion’ prevails throughout Cantle’s report and forms the basis of many of the 67 recommendations. The concept of community or social cohesion was to influence government thinking during a subsequent series of policy initiatives and to focus their attention primarily on the need to encourage increased ‘bridging’ social capital at the expense of the ‘bonding’ social capital which they perceived as a potential threat to harmonious communication between segregated ethnic groups and a key contributory factor in relation to the community breakdown.

In order to develop the theme of ‘community cohesion’ Cantle explains that this is a term which **‘has recently become popular in public policy debates. It is closely linked to other concepts such as inclusion and exclusion, social capital and differentiation, community and neighbourhood’.** Moreover it has been **‘the focus of a number of policies and initiatives aimed principally at reducing social exclusion’** (Cantle 2001:13-14). A seven page appendix to the report which provides a detailed analysis of the concept of ‘community cohesion’ refers to it as having originally been defined ‘largely in economic terms’ but as now encompassing such aspects as **‘access to education and employment, poverty and social inequalities, social and cultural diversity....’** (Lynch in Cantle 2001:69). Volunteering is seen as **‘closely linked to community cohesion’** and Putnam’s definition of social capital as **‘connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them’** is quoted in support of the approach (Lynch in Cantle 2001:72)

Having established the credentials of the concept of ‘community cohesion’ through its link with social capital Cantle’s findings and recommendations then centre round the perceived reasons for community breakdown and start to reflect on the potential ‘glue’ which is required to effect the necessary repairs. The report suggests a number of probable causes for the social collapse in the areas affected including a resistance by local institutions, political parties and ‘even’ voluntary organisations to face up to ‘an open and honest dialogue’ about the divisions in the community leading in turn to a failure to **‘develop clear values which focus on what it means to be a citizen of a modern multi-racial Britain’** (Cantle 2001:9). Moreover it appears that because local leadership has been largely unsuccessful in counteracting racist and discriminatory behaviour in communities affected by the disturbances, this has to some extent paved the way for right wing extremist groups to further undermine any attempts being made by the former to achieve community cohesion. The (apparently voluntary) separation of communities is also perceived to be behind the problems which have arisen in relation to the foundering of several local regeneration initiatives. In Cantle’s view the principle of community cohesion has been overlooked in determining funding for the various schemes and therefore **‘much more emphasis should be placed upon thematic programmes, with a more universal approach, rather than those locked on to particular geographical areas’** (Cantle 2001:27). This recommendation for avoiding the **‘damaging impact of different communities bidding against each other’** (Cantle 2001:25) is reinforced by the observation that the review team had seen **‘evidence of resentment being fuelled by suggestions that one particular sector of the community was getting a disproportionate share of available monies..’** and moreover that this resentment was aimed at funding **‘being provided to minority ethnic groups for what some white political leaders saw as being unnecessary or trivial purposes’**(Cantle 2001:17)

Elsewhere in the report Cantle also proposes that single community funding should only be provided in exceptional circumstances while priority should be given to schemes which were based on needs across communities such as literacy, capacity building and immigration advice for example (Cantle 2001:38)

Cantle places much emphasis in his recommendations on the importance to community cohesion of ‘people and their values’, stating that **‘many of the present problems seem to owe a great deal to the failure to communicate and agree a clear set of clear values that can govern behaviour’** (Cantle 2001:18) This has in his view been due partly to the tendency to **‘tiptoe around’** any attempt to discuss the more sensitive topics of **‘race, religion and culture’** (ibid) His suggested solution involves a national debate on the ‘rights and responsibilities’ of each community which encompasses agreement to **‘some common elements of nationhood’** (Cantle 2001:19) In addition there should be established **‘a meaningful concept of “citizenship”** which **‘recognises the contribution of all cultures to this Nation’s development.....and a clearer statement of allegiance, perhaps along the lines of the Canadian model’** (Cantle 2001:20)

The report outlines as its key aims the promotion of community cohesion **‘based upon a greater knowledge of, contact between, and respect for, the various cultures that now make Great Britain such a rich and diverse nation’** and the encouragement of a ‘greater sense of citizenship’ which would allow for shared common principles to be espoused and observed by all sections of the community and would also **‘place a higher value on cultural differences’** (Cantle 2001:10) This sets the scene for a series of policy interventions by the government which were to proliferate during the next eight or nine years during which time major events involving the nation’s security would introduce a heightened sense of urgency about the need for community and social cohesion especially within areas of the country where racial and ethnic conflict had taken place and might be anticipated again in the future. Whereas Putnam’s social capital thesis had apparently been taken on board, the government’s mainly culturally-based approach in attempting to build ‘bridging’ links between the white, black and minority ethnic groups had failed to take sufficient account of the structural divisions between the relatively rich and poor, the employed and unemployed,the socially included and the socially marginalised – an oversight which the nation might have future reason to regret.

**2.14** The theme of community cohesion was further expanded upon in the report of the inter-departmental Ministerial Group on Public Order and Community Cohesion chaired by John Denham MP. The Group, which had been set up at the behest of the Home Secretary following the ‘serious disorder’ in Bradford on 7-10 July 2001, was asked to recommend **‘action to minimise the threat of further disorder and build strong more cohesive communities’** (Denham 2002:36). The report drew extensively on the findings and issues raised by the Community Cohesion Review Team as well as those discussed in the three local reports for Bradford, Oldham and Burnley. It also took account of relevant research by the Commission for Racial Equality into segregation in the North West of England and a study by the Policy Innovation Unit into ethnic minority access to the labour market. It is also noteworthy that since the local disturbances of the summer of 2001 the events of September 11 in America had taken place leading to a subsequent rise in the UK of racially motivated incidents and increased tensions in ethnically mixed communities, with Muslims being a key target for racist activity. This had been condemned by the Government while the Prime Minister and other senior cabinet colleagues had openly expressed their continuing support for the Muslim community.

Denham distinguishes between the respective remits of the Ministerial Group review which was required to present recommendations for central government’s response to the social disorder and specifically propose what should be done to give practical help and support to the local communities affected. On the other hand it is pointed out that the Community Cohesion Review Team led by Cantle had been especially charged with obtaining the views of local people and organisations, including in those areas unaffected by the disturbances. In drawing therefore on a range of information sources the Denham report was able to adopt a wider viewpoint, which encompassed not only the cultural aspects of the events but also the structural concerns arising from the fact that ‘**all the wards affected were amongst the 20% most deprived in the country – and parts of Oldham and Burnley rank in the most deprived 1%’** (Denham 2002:8). Although for Denham community cohesion as a government strategy is high on the agenda he recognises that **‘there are no easy answers or quick fixes to the deep fracturing of communities....’** and that **‘the causes are multi-layered and complex’** (Denham 2002: Introduction).

However Denham does take on board the call for a **‘widespread and open debate about identity, shared values, and common citizenship as part of the process of building cohesive communities’** and the perceived need to **‘promote the common rights and responsibilities around citizenship for those seeking residence in this country’**(Denham 2002: Introduction). In identifying some of the common issues in the areas where disturbances had occurred the report highlights inter alia the lack of a strong civic identity or shared social values among different communities which was shown for example in the way that groups segregated themselves and young people had disengaged from the local decision-making process (Denham 2002:11). This was contrasted with places like Birmingham, Leicester and Southall where **‘...a shared sense of belonging to, and pride in, a common civic identity’** was apparent (Denham 2002:11). Later in referring to weak political and community leadership the repercussions of loss of community confidence are seen to include **‘erosion of trust in civic institutions.....’** and loss of opportunities for **‘different communities to meet and work together’** (Denham 2002:13). Although not explicitly stated at this point, Denham appears to be suggesting here that inadequate leadership can contribute to a deficit in social capital, and in particular the loss of opportunity to build the desirable ‘bridging’ connections which can bring different communities together.

**2.15** Nevertheless there is a strong thread running through the report that reveals an underlying awareness of and sensitivity to the social disadvantages of the communities under review and which are manifested in references to the levels of unemployment and deprivation in some of the poorer areas and affecting particular categories of people to a varying extent but more especially the young men, some from white as well as black and ethnic minority groups. In identifying the issues at the outset, Denham makes the point that **’the interaction between a series of economic, social and cultural issues must be understood’** and therefore **‘tackling one or more problems in isolation’** will be unlikely to resolve **‘a complex and multi-layered situation’**(Denham 2002:10). In order to reconcile the economic, social and cultural aspects he therefore recommends that all policy initiatives, including those regarding housing, education, employment, sport and culture should be set within a framework of building or promoting community cohesion and he expects local government and local government related agencies to ensure that all their policy proposals fulfil these criteria. He acknowledges however that **‘Government cannot create or impose community cohesion. It is something that communities must do themselves with Government’s help as enabler and supporter’** (Denham 2002:34).

In sum the message the Government is conveying through the Denham report as well as the Cantle report is strongly in support of ‘community cohesion’ with the implied expectation that although local government will be allowed a certain amount of ‘free reign’ as to how this is to be achieved - with central government standing back as ‘supporter’ and ‘enabler’- this message will nevertheless be attended to. Again though it is clear that, despite Denham’s greater emphasis on the structural aspects of the social disorder and the need to address these, the discourse of ‘community cohesion’ for the Government is starting to take the form of a ‘shared values’ debate with the associated themes of ‘common citizenship’ and ‘rights and responsibilities’ now coming strongly to the fore.

**2.16 David Blunkett (2002) Integration with Diversity: Globalisation and the Renewal of Democracy and Civil Society – article by Home Secretary, Foreign Policy Centre**

This article was published in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York and therefore the Home Secretary’s comments on community and integration were strongly influenced by the need to maintain a sensitive (and indeed political) balance between his responsibilities in relation to security and social order and the preservation of a ‘healthy democracy and strong civil society’ (Blunkett 2002:8) He does this quite neatly by linking the two issues together, suggesting that **‘establishing basic order and security is a prerequisite of building social capital’** (Blunkett 2002:9-10) Given the Labour Government’s already declared commitment to the promotion of community cohesion and the importance of building ‘bridging’ social capital links between the white and black and minority ethnic populations in the UK Blunkett is at pains to emphasise the cultural as well as economic benefits of migration which **‘increases the diversity of our societies’** while acknowledging that it can also be seen as **‘a threat to community stability and good race relations’** (Blunkett 2002:1) With this political balancing act and the adoption of a ‘middle of the road’ stance which is intended to be firm but fair he attempts to defuse some of the hostility felt by certain sections of society towards Islam particularly in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks - attitudes which threaten to undermine the substantial work previously undertaken by the Government to build good relations between communities following the civic disturbances in the UK in 2001. He points out that the people of New York ‘pulled together’ after 11th September **‘displaying not just mutual sympathy, support and solidarity, but a patriotic commitment to their democracy’**(Blunkett 2002:4)He also introduces Robert Putnam into the argument, referring to the latter’s post-September 11th survey of social capital which indicated that people had **‘become more concerned about community and politics, and more engaged as citizens, as a result of this atrocity’** which appeared to have promoted **‘greater social cohesion and civic awareness’** (Blunkett 2002:5) Later in the article he talks about ‘tackling crime together’ again linking one of his key responsibilities- which is also a major concern of the British public-to the notion of a ‘good society’ where people can be active citizens and influence what happens in their own communities rather than letting others do things for them (Blunkett 2002:9) Here he introduces a concept of citizenship which he asserts must involve **‘basic rights and duties’** (Blunkett 2002:12) When referring to the Government’s initiatives on citizenship Blunkett also calls for **‘integration with diversity’** rather than **‘forced assimilation into a monoculture, or an unbridled multiculturalism which privileges difference over community cohesion’** (Blunkett 2002:11) In language which recalls some of the features of social capital as well as community cohesion he maintains that citizenship should be **‘an active , real expression of the life of the community’** and that  **‘we must strive to connect people from different backgrounds, tackle segregation, and overcome mutual hostility and ignorance’**

In this article David Blunkett is drawing on social capital arguments with special reference to Robert Putnam’s work in order to introduce discourse about ‘active citizenship’ and integration. Putnam’s survey on social capital following the events of September 11 had indicated a re-awakening of patriotic feeling and social solidarity in the country which he believed was encouraging and might signal a longer term revival of social capital for the future. Blunkett is therefore able to promote the civic benefits of social capital within the context of an ‘integrated’ society rather than a ‘cohesive’ society. However although he explains this does not mean ‘forced assimilation’ into a single culture he rejects the alternative of ‘unbridled multiculturalism’ which is presumably a comment on past rather than future policy

**2.17** **(a) Strength in Diversity: Towards a Community Cohesion and Race Equality Strategy Home Office (2004)**

**(b) New Challenges for race equality and community cohesion in the 21st century. Speech by David Blunkett to the Institute of Public Policy Research (7th July 2004)**

The consultation paper ‘Strength in Diversity’ launched in the spring of 2004 aimed to continue the move towards a **‘successful integrated society’** by building on the work initiated through the Race Relations (Amendment) Act of 2000 and progressing towards the complete elimination of racial discrimination as well as promoting equality of opportunity and good relations between different racial groups (Home Office 2004:1) The achievement of racial equality was seen as an essential pre-condition for fulfilling the Government’s commitment to a fully cohesive society, thus a Community Cohesion and Race Equality strategy would be launched later in the year whereby the Government would lead **‘an honest** **and robust debate’** drawing widely on views across the country, by for example setting up workshops and other consultative events, but especially by encouraging community and local leaders to take forward discussions within their own areas of responsibility (Home Office 2004:1-2) The consultation document explains the need for a community cohesion and race equality strategy and suggests that integration is **‘not about assimilation’** but more about a two-way process between established communities and new arrivals (Home Office 2004:4) There is a focus on the concept of ‘active’ citizenship which is to be achieved through **‘...participation, volunteering and civic action, underpinned by a sense of shared values...’** (Home Office 2004:6) and a definition of what it means to be British is put forward (Home Office 2004:6-7) There is also more emphasis in this consultation paper on the merits of an integrated society and the need for diversity to be respected and valued within a **‘framework of rights and responsibilities’** (Home Office 2004:7)The document also refers to the Government’s ongoing agenda regarding the promotion of active citizenship including initiatives already introduced such as citizenship education in schools, citizenship ceremonies for those applying for British nationality and more focus on teaching the English language (Home Office 2004:8)

**2.18** In addressing race inequalities the report gives due consideration to the deprivation and economic and social disadvantage suffered disproportionately by black and minority ethnic communities while at the same time acknowledging that not only race but other factors such as social class, religion and gender can lead to a position of multiple-disadvantage. There is therefore an assurance given that **‘tackling poverty and deprivation in all communities is a priority across Government’** (Home Office 2004:13-14).The report also refers to the problems of segregation which it is alleged led to the disturbances in Northern English towns in 2001 but recognises that many people in the ‘divided’ communities were unable to choose a more integrated lifestyle owing to socio-economic disadvantage or fear of discrimination or harassment (Home Office2004:16) In concluding its deliberations the consultation document reiterates the importance of building a cohesive society and suggests various ways in which this can be done using a number of examples where local initiatives have succeeded in building ‘bridges’ between communities (Home Office 2004:17) Finally emphasis is placed on the need inter alia for Government and the public services generally to **‘invest in capacity building.....involving local people in the planning and delivery of public services’**(Home Office 2004:19)

This strategy document progresses the theme of Community Cohesion and Race Equality with community cohesion still taking precedence as Government policy. However there is an attempt in this paper to address structural issues and focus on achieving more of a ‘level playing field’ particularly for those suffering multiple disadvantage through race, socio-economic disadvantage and discrimination for example. It recognises that insufficient progress has been made towards achieving racial equality and therefore understands that strong measures need to be put in place before the conditions for a truly cohesive society can be met. Nevertheless the document indicates clearly that the total elimination of discrimination will facilitate the move towards a fully integrated (again not assimilated) society while the discourse of active citizenship, ‘Britishness’ and rights and responsibilities is strongly featured in the text. Despite drawing on the concept of social capital by describing ‘active‘ citizenship in terms of participation, volunteering and shared values, the document’s prescriptive tone rather detracts from the ‘bottom-up’ spontaneous approach advocated by Putnam.

**2.19** In his speech to the Institute of Public Policy Research David Blunkett draws substantially on the main issues discussed in the consultation document ‘Strength in Diversity: Towards a Community Cohesion and Race Equality strategy’ which had been issued a couple of months previously. When discussing the benefits of diversity he refers however to the ongoing debate amongst social scientists concerning some of the possible negative effects of increasing diversity on **‘what is termed “social capital” –the glue which holds society together’** (Blunkett 2004:4) citing in this argument research by Robert Putnam and MORI in the UK which had indicated that the more diverse a community, the less likely people were to feel able to trust each other (ibid) However Blunkett himself believes that where diversity exists in a community and there is also integration **‘...social capital is strengthened rather than undermined’** (Blunkett 2004:5) and illustrates this point by reference to a Home Office Citizenship Survey which demonstrated that the building of ‘bridging’ links across the wider community encouraged volunteering ( an indicator of the presence of social capital) Blunkett also reiterates the ‘inclusive’ notion of “active” British citizenship’ mentioned in the consultation paper as well as the idea of shared ‘rights and responsibilities’ (Blunkett 2004:7) and generally confirms the initiatives the Government has already taken for new citizens to ‘integrate’ with particular focus on involving young people through expanding the national curriculum to include citizenship studies and providing improved opportunities for volunteering (Blunkett 2004:10-11).

**2.20** While addressing the issue of racism Blunkett is particularly concerned with the performance of the Criminal Justice system in for example meeting their targets for workforce representation proportionate to the communities they serve and notes that all Departments are making progress although the **‘police service has some way to go’** (Blunkett 2004:15)This objective is seen as an essential step forward in eradicating racial discrimination and institutional racism which has been emphasised also in previous documents referring to community cohesion as well as the independent local investigations carried out following the Bradford, Oldham and Burnley disturbances. Blunkett’s endorsement of the proposed actions to combat racism and also discrimination on religious grounds appears to be an essential as well as significant move towards the achievement of racial equality which serves to reinforce the Government’s commitment to create more of a level playing field so that community cohesion and social capital can flourish. Blunkett ends his speech on a strong note with a number of positive examples of local projects where cohesive communities have been successfully achieved (Blunkett 2004:19-20).

In his speech Blunkett endorses the notion of ‘strength in diversity’ and points out that, despite the thinking of a number of social science researchers, diversity is not incompatible with social capital in a society where there is also integration, citing a number of practical examples to support his argument. He acknowledges lack of progress in combating racism and discrimination in certain areas with the Criminal Justice system in particular still falling short in employing representative numbers from ethnic minority groups. He fully backs the strategy report’s findings and recommendations emphasising its references to ‘active British citizenship’ ‘shared rights and responsibilities’ and ‘inclusiveness’ justifying these comments by associating them positively with the development of social capital.

**2.21** **Community Cohesion Panel (2004) The End of Parallel lives?**

This is the final report of the independent Panel set up in 2002 **‘to work with and advise Ministers on the development of Community Cohesion at national and local levels’** (CCP 2004:7) The main thrust of the report was that more still needed to be done by central and local government to ‘manage’ the settlement of communities as well as migration in accordance with the national Government’s declared policies. Local authorities should adopt a ‘leadership role’ and take responsibility for bringing all communities together and promoting tolerant attitudes and shared values (CCP 2004:8) The Panel commended a number of local schemes which were beginning to break down some of the ‘parallel lives’ revealed in earlier reports however **‘Community Cohesion needs to be “mainstreamed” and much more closely linked to the racial equality agenda’** (ibid) The report also endorses many of the points made in the consultation document ‘Strength in Diversity’ discussed in foregoing sections of this research review. By now it is assumed that the Government’s Community Cohesion agenda has been well established in the minds of all interested parties including the government and community stakeholders who are tasked with making progress on a wide range of initiatives to ensure this agenda is fulfilled. The report confirms that much progress has already been made on the recommendations put forward in earlier reports and that community cohesion is now **‘...accepted as an essential and desirable complement to the racial equality strategy...’** (CCP 2004:12) Citizenship, in the sense of shared values and identity is clearly regarded as important however the Panel expresses some disappointment at the **‘apparently limited impact of the compulsory citizenship education in schools to date’** (CCP 2004:13) and urges the extension of Citizenship ceremonies and other national and local citizenship activities to promote a greater sense of involvement between communities and the understanding and acceptance by citizens of each other’s cultural heritage (CCP 2004:14).

**2.22** There are some other causes of dissatisfaction also for the Panel. Unlike the Home Office most other Government Departments have been slow to take on board ownership of an integrated community cohesion and equality agenda and have failed to include provision for this in their policies and programmes (CCP 2004:18) In addition many initiatives are regarded as short-term and more likely to be provided by agencies in the voluntary sector rather than from ‘mainstream activity’(ibid) Other developments are welcomed however such as the establishment of the new Faith Communities Unit in the Home Office. The Panel approves the increased involvement of faith groups and stresses the important contribution they can make towards community cohesion (CCP 2004:30) The report also focuses on the issue of loss of social capital in the UK, remarking on the reported decline of voluntary associations at community level. It is suggested however that many of the community cohesion policies designed to encourage ‘cross-cultural contact’ currently being promoted by various agencies of Government including the Civil Renewal Unit will help to ‘rebuild social capital’ in particular ‘bridging’ capital and this again is welcomed (CCP 2004:20-21)

In conclusion this is a comprehensive document which exhaustively records and monitors the progress that has been made nationally and locally towards incorporating the essential principles of a coherent community cohesion and equality strategy into all aspects of Government and public sector activity. The Panel highlights areas of shortfall and issues which are still outstanding however it is clear that their investigation has left no stone unturned in their efforts to ensure that the community cohesion and equality agenda is strongly embedded wherever the Government exerts influence or responsibility.

**2.23 Home Office Faith Communities Unit (2004) Working Together:** **Co-operation between Government and Faith Communities (Recommendations of the Steering Group reviewing patterns of engagement between Government and Faith Communities in England)**

This review was commissioned by the Government in order to explore ways in which co-operation and dialogue could be achieved with the faith communities at national level and to seek recommendations as to how Government Departments could set up effective consultation machinery in order to harness the knowledge and expertise of this important group of contributors to the voluntary and community sector. There had previously been successful collaborations between Government and the faith communities in relation to the Millennium celebrations of 2000 and the Golden Jubilee in 2002 however in general Government ‘engagement’ with the faith communities had been ‘patchy’ and it was now considered time to put relationships on a more formal footing (Steering Group Review 2004:Foreword) The Review acknowledged that consultations with the faith communities had already been taking place within different Government Departments as a matter of routine business – for example on urban regeneration – and was not attempting to change ‘existing good practice’ ( SGR 2004:8) It also referred to the already developing relationships between local authorities and locally based faith communities and inter-faith groups and cites the results of a pilot consultation exercise carried out in Leeds from which useful lessons had been drawn (SGR 2004:9).

The Review principally takes the form of advising Government Departments at national level on the principles and practice of ‘effective consultation’ with faith communities pointing out that the Government’s normal consultation processes and mechanisms will need to be modified and adapted to some extent in order to meet the special circumstances of dialogue with voluntary organisations of differing internal communicative structure and maybe lacking the sufficient financial and human resources to comply with Government’s more stringent consultative timetables. In a way this perceived need to ‘make allowances’ could be seen as an opportunity to emphasise the potential power of an unequal partnership. For example at one point the Review, in a section providing guidance to faith communities on responding to Government initiatives, suggests representatives should meet separately together to agree on a common approach in a manner reminiscent of conventional trade union negotiation and consultation processes (SGR 2004:34) However the language of the Review document on the whole avoids such condescension and couches its advice in sensitive and respectful terms with a real sense of valuing the Government’s consultative partners as equal in what they can ‘bring to the table’ recognising also that ‘engagement is a two-way process’ whereby the faith communities should also be allowed the opportunity to initiate agenda issues with Government (SGR 2004:19).

In terms of the community cohesion agenda the Review points out that many Government policies **‘such as those in support of community cohesion’** are carried out locally and regionally (SGR 2004:61) accepting that while there are considerable variations in the ‘profile’ of local faith communities many local authorities have been developing effective relationships with faith communities and inter-faith groups, the latter of which in particular are perceived as capable of making a positive contribution to community cohesion. Nevertheless some problems in local and regional consultative processes had been identified and guidance from the Local Government Association in this respect was considered relevant for the purpose of central Government consultations (SGR 2004:67) In addition reference is made to the role of the Community Cohesion Faith Practitioners Group, set up as a sub-group of the Community Cohesion Panel, which had separately been examining how faith communities could contribute to community cohesion (SGR 2004:71-72) This and other parallel developments mentioned in the Review indicate the ‘joined- up’ thinking of the Government about community cohesion at that time.

**2.24 Local Government Association (2004) Community Cohesion – an action guide: guidance for local authorities**

This is arguably one of the most significant documents on community cohesion issued during this period, demonstrating as it does the continued and persistent commitment of the Government to ensure the practical implementation of its community cohesion principles ‘on the ground’. This updated and expanded action guide was produced in partnership by the Local Government Association, Audit Commission, Commission for Racial Equality, Home Office, Improvement and Development Agency, the Inter Faith Network and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister signifying the high profile, collaborative nature of this exercise as well as its importance to those endorsing its proposals. The 96 page guide is comprehensive, clearly and logically written, with detailed advice reinforced by numerous references to supplementary resources such as ‘how to’ booklets, ‘toolkits’ and supporting survey data as well as the description of a series of (often innovative and imaginative) case study examples from ‘Beacon’ local authorities which provide helpful instances of good practice throughout the country. The document sets out what is meant by community cohesion, adopting the definition previously laid down by the Local Government Association in its earlier 2002 guide. This includes **‘a common** **vision and a sense of belonging for all communities’, ’similar life opportunities’** for people coming from **‘different backgrounds’** and the promotion of **‘strong and positive relationships.....in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods’** (LGA 2004:7) In defining community cohesion the guide also reaffirms the close link with ‘integration’ stating that it **‘aims to build communities where people feel confident that they belong and are comfortable mixing and interacting with others.....’** (ibid)

In delivering advice to constituent Local Authorities the guide covers wide-ranging issues which encompass the principles and rationale of a series of ‘community cohesion’ objectives as well as the practical steps required to achieve them (LGA 2004:8-9) At each stage of the process relevant examples of existing good practice are introduced which highlight what has been achieved in various areas by local authorities, some of which have overcome difficult challenges of community breakdown. Topics addressed include the development of ‘vision, values and strategy’ (LGA 2004:8-11); the measurement of community cohesion (LGA 2004:12-15); conflict resolution; ‘embedding’ community cohesion in delivering services and working with all sections of the community including relationships with other professional bodies such as the police and media. Every aspect is covered, for example in measuring community cohesion the Home Office Citizenship Survey is invoked for its usefulness in providing data on attitudinal responses about ‘institutional trust’ ‘racial prejudice and discrimination’ ‘active community participation’ and so on (LGA 2004:14) A particularly useful section addresses ways in which authorities can tackle conflict resolution, suggesting community mediation as one of the most effective interventions and again citing existing examples of good practice (LGA 2004:21-24).

**2.25 Home Office (2005) Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society: The Government’s strategy to increase race equality and community cohesion**

This document is the strategy formulated in response to consultations that were initiated by the 2004 paper ‘Strength in Diversity: Towards a Community Cohesion and Race Equality Strategy’ There appears to be a slight change of emphasis indicated by the title in that race equality now precedes community cohesion, however this is likely to signify the Government’s recognition that race equality has to be achieved successfully before the objective of community cohesion can be attained in any real sense. However race equality is a necessary but not sufficient condition for a ‘cohesive society’ which **‘relies on more than equal opportunities .......It also relies on a number of social conditions that help people from all backgrounds to come together and develop a sense of inclusion and shared British identity defined by common opportunities and mutual expectations on all citizens to contribute to society’** (Home Office 2005:11) In strengthening community cohesion the Government accepts that there must be **‘progress in increasing life chances for all....’** further acknowledging that **‘....deprivation and lack of opportunity have been significant contributory factors’** when referring to the ‘tensions’ which arose in some Northern English towns in 2001 between ‘different ethnic groups’ (Home Office 2005:19)Nevertheless there is more to a ‘strong society’ than ‘good individual life chances’ for people also need a ‘sense of common belonging and identity’ while **‘National cohesion rests on an inclusive sense of Britishness which couples the offer of fair mutual support – from security to health and education- with the expectation that people will play their part in society and respect others’** (Home Office 2005:20) The ‘rights and responsibilities’ theme is again emerging with the Government appearing to say that if they keep their end of the bargain, all groups in society must also fulfil their own part of the ‘deal’. The latter’s role, it is implied, is to comply with the Government’s definition of a ‘cohesive society’ once the ground has been suitably laid, by avoiding discrimination and behaving with respect towards others, making a contribution to their communities, demonstrating willingness to mix and interact with those outside their own cultural and ethnic groups etc. The strategy document sets out in some detail how the Government plans to improve equality in all areas of people’s lives. This includes the creation of a new body, the Commission for Equality and Human Rights as well as extending the existing legislative protection (regarding employment and vocational training) against religious discrimination to cover the provision of goods and services (Home Office 2005:39) The second part of the document specifically addresses the issue of building community cohesion where the Government’s perspective is more fully elaborated including what is expected of British citizens in return for the improvements made in life chances and opportunities etc. These expectations encompass the requirement for new British citizens to integrate more effectively by for instance acquiring English language skills and learning about life in the UK (Home Office 2005:42). There is also reference to opportunities for greater civic participation such as volunteering and increased involvement in decision making about the planning and delivery of services (Home Office 2005:47) citing local initiatives that are already being taken to promote community cohesion (Home Office 2005:52) Related publications being issued alongside the strategy document are also mentioned reinforcing various aspects of the Government’s policy on race equality, diversity and equal opportunities which are being promulgated at the same time.

This paper brings together a number of policy strands which the Government has been pursuing since the beginning of the decade. There is still a strong emphasis on integration, particularly for ‘new British citizens’ and the expectation that this will take place within a framework of responsibilities as well as rights. Stipulations about the required contribution of British citizens to their society are made on the basis that the Government has played its part in creating the conditions under which social capital can flourish, for example racial equality, security, health and education. In return people are called upon to reciprocate by fulfilling their civic obligations and taking on board shared values as well as a shared British identity. To be fair the Government has indeed expended considerable effort in its attempts to provide an environment with increased opportunities: The Local Government Association Guide is exemplary of its kind while the establishment of the Faith Communities Unit at central government level and its document ‘Working Together’ have demonstrated commitment to dialogue with important sections of the community whose knowledge and expertise is recognised as a valuable contributor to the building of social capital in civic society. In addition the strategy document ‘Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society’ with its greater focus on race equality clearly confirms the Government’s determination to eliminate inequality as also does the creation of a new body the Commission for Equality and Human Rights and the extension of previous legislative protection in relation to religious discrimination. It is therefore not unexpected that Government would make demands of their citizens in return – however the delivery of their side of the bargain was not totally in their hands and some of the agents charged with carrying out the strategy failed in their attempts as would become evident in due course. In the meantime the Government’s priorities were suddenly and dramatically changed by an act of terrorism in the UK in July 2005 bringing back issues of national security onto the political agenda and the perceived need to tackle extremism - this time on home ground.

**2.26 House of Commons Home Affairs Committee’s Report (2005) Terrorism and Community Relations**

This report, which was published before the terror attacks on London in July of the same year, outlines the Government’s response to the issues raised in the 2004-2005 session of the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee. Many of the matters raised by the Committee touched on the Government’s policies concerning community relations, community cohesion and racial discrimination with particular reference to the use of anti-terrorism powers under newly introduced legislation. Connections were made between the Government’s arrangements for tackling international terrorism and the building of cohesive communities with the fear being expressed for example that anti-terrorist activities by the police and unfavourable reporting by the media were incompatible with the creation of trust and confidence needed for communities to work and live together in harmony. This particularly affected the Muslim communities who believed that they were being specifically targeted for example by police ‘stop and search’ methods while not enough was being done to publicise the fact when potential terrorist suspects had actually been released without charge.

The Government’s responses to the issues raised confirmed the policies and strategies that were being introduced to tackle racism and discrimination stating that **‘Increasing the trust and confidence of minority ethnic communities remains a priority of this Government’** (HCHAC 2005:3) Frequent reference was made to the Government’s strategy to increase race equality and community cohesion, their report ‘Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society’ having been published a few months beforehand (ibid) However Government were working on improving diversity in the police service recognising that progress in this area was unsatisfactory (ibid) Regarding the impact of anti-terrorism activities on community cohesion the Government affirmed that action was being taken to ‘**remedy the perceived lack of co-ordination between community cohesion policies and its counter-terrorism initiatives’** (HCHAC 2005:7) The Committee also made reference to the importance of an **‘inclusive British identity’** which can only be achieved by **‘the full participation of all parts of society’** (HCHAC 2005:14) The Government fully concurred with this conclusion and again pointed out that this was reflected in the strategy ‘Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society’ as was also the intention to formulate **‘a vision for an inclusive British society’** which was **‘not about assimilation of cultural differences...’** (HCHAC 2005:15) Regarding the Committee’s concerns about negative media reporting of international terrorism and community relations, the Government outlined steps that had been taken following the disturbances in Bradford, Oldham and Burnley in 2001 to support measures suggested by a media practitioners group that practical guidance should be issued to facilitate **‘accurate and fair reporting’** (HCHAC 2005:16) In general the Government responded to all issues raised by the Home Affairs Committee by referring to the community cohesion policies and strategies previously set out in a series of documents on the subject and by maintaining a consistent approach as to their commitment which they did not feel was compromised by the new powers introduced under the Terrorism Act.

**2.27 (a) Gordon Brown (14/01/2006) Speech to the Fabian Society Conference on the future of Britishness**

**(b) Ruth Kelly (24/08/2006) Speech at the launch of the new Commission on Integration and Cohesion**

**(c) Ruth Kelly (11/10/2006) Speech to Muslim organisations on working together to tackle extremism – Britain: our values, our responsibilities**

**(d) Tony Blair (08/12/2006) Speech on Multiculturalism and Integration. ‘The Duty to Integrate: Shared British Values**

These four speeches delivered during 2006 by high profile Labour Government ministers, including the Prime Minister, continue the theme of building a cohesive society however the discourse is now more focused on the issue of ‘shared values’ and ‘Britishness.’ In the context of the terrorist attacks which occurred in London in July 2005, the increased counter-terrorist measures which were subsequently introduced by the Government and the heightened global alert regarding international terrorism during this period the Labour Government while wishing to maintain a consistent approach towards its strategy of community cohesion and racial equality was also concerned to reassure the general public that appropriate security arrangements had been put in place. However it was also necessary to avoid alienating the Muslim organisations in particular who perceived that members of their community were being targeted as a result of the ‘backlash’ to these events and moreover believed that their organisations were being put under unfair pressure to take the main responsibility for tackling the extremism that was alleged to be in their midst.

In his speech to the Fabian Society at their New Year Conference in 2006 Gordon Brown starts by placing the notion of Britishness within a historical setting however he prefaces these remarks by referring to the challenges of attaining inter alia a **‘modern view of citizenship’** and a **‘balance between diversity and integration’ (**Brown 2006:1) He questions whether such a balance has been achieved but believes Britishness and the ‘responsibilities of citizenship’ can be defined on the basis of ‘shared values’. He suggests that a sense of shared purpose could be summarised as **‘liberty for all, responsibility by all and fairness to all’** and these aims are reiterated throughout his speech (Brown 2006:2) On the question of a national British identity Brown points out that two thirds of the population now identify Britishness as important, an increase of 20% from a few years previously. He cites ‘liberty’ as an enduring British value linking it with **‘a strong sense of duty and responsibility’** and **‘solidarity’** (ibid) These characteristics have led in turn to **‘Mutuality, co-operation, civic associations and social responsibility and a strong civic society’** (ibid) He also extols the notion of patriotism suggesting that the term, sometimes perceived negatively in its traditional sense as ‘flag-waving’ should be defined anew in line with the re-interpretation of what are in reality long-held British values (Brown 2006:3) In seeking to apply these values in a modern society Brown advocates devolving power to achieve liberty, encouraging the building of strong local institutions to facilitate responsibility and allowing people to become involved in decisions that impact on their lives (ibid) He is particularly concerned to propose ways in which citizens can participate in voluntary and community activity such as a ‘youth national community service’, ‘mentoring and befriending’ the more ‘vulnerable’ members of a community and ‘citizens juries’ (Brown 2006;4) However he also warns that debates about Britishness and integration are now urgent because of the **‘terrorism in our midst’** and calls for immediate attention to issues concerning **‘the incitement to hatred...’** and **‘inequalities in job and educational opportunities’** as well as further action to promote integration, for example by **‘...expanding mandatory English training’** Finally Brown sets out the objectives which a ‘modern view of Britishness’requires including the rebuilding of civic society and working for integration of minorities into a modern Britain.

In this speech Brown has reinforced the discourse of integration while maintaining that this can be achieved by continuing to do what we do best as British citizens. Although not explicit, given the audience, the community cohesion theme is threaded into his recommendations as to how ‘shared’ British values can be put into practice and it is only towards the end of the speech that the audience is reminded of the tougher stance that needs to be taken to expedite these aims. Brown also introduces the notion of a reworking of traditional British values into what he terms ‘a modern view of Britishness’. In seeking to apply ‘enduring’ British values within a contemporary setting he suggests that ‘liberty for all, responsibility by all and fairness to all’ is an appropriate description of the core values that should be shared by all British citizens.

**2.28** In August 2006 Ruth Kelly was the key speaker at the launch of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion. She began by celebrating diversity as a **‘huge asset to our country-economically, culturally and socially’** and described the many benefits that immigration had contributed to the UK, where migrant workers were ‘vital’ to supporting the public and other ‘essential’ services (Kelly 2006a:1) However Kelly was also concerned to propose a **‘new and honest debate about integration and cohesion in the UK’** (ibid) She refers to the ‘global tensions’ which are **‘being reflected on the streets of local communities’** and the increasing challenges that for example second and third generation immigrants are experiencing in trying to **‘reconcile their own values with those of their parents and grandparents’** (Kelly 2006a:2) This she believes poses a problem for integration which is also affecting the ‘white’ Britons some of whom are uncomfortable about the rapid changes in their communities and resentful of the perceived favoured treatment being provided to ethnic minorities. Kelly questions whether ‘multiculturalism’ whereby the Government has been at pains not to impose **‘a single British identity and culture’** has led to the complete separation of some communities with **‘no common bonds between them’** (ibid)

The new Commission on Integration and Cohesion is however designed to investigate how communities can be brought together, by examining best practice in local areas where community cohesion is seen to be working.The Commission will also encourage local authorities and community organisations to take on greater responsibility for the integration into and contribution of new migrants towards their communities. The aim is to identify good practice and extend this to achieve **‘a more consistent national picture’** (Kelly 2006a:3) Kelly’s tone becomes more robust in outlining the challenges of debate. She wishes to confront important issues such as managed migration and asylum without the inhibition of ‘political correctness’ or the fear of being considered racist. She refers to the race and cohesion strategy ‘Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society’ as the crucial framework within which an ‘open and honest’ debate can be conducted (ibid)

In her final remarks Kelly mentions that although everyone has equal rights, **‘with rights come responsibilities’** and **‘non-negotiable rules’** in respect of all groups whether new or established (ibid) She also points out that **‘Integration and cohesion are not states but processes’** which need to be ‘worked at’ over a period of time. They are for everyone not just for ethnic minorities (Kelly 2006a:4)

In this speech the theme of integration now takes precedence over community cohesion and while Ruth Kelly is careful to maintain a balance in talking about different communities it is apparent that the aim of the Commission is to approach the issue of community cohesion from the perspective mainly of integrating new and established immigrant communities into the UK. Community cohesion is still very much on the agenda but the emphasis has subtly changed as to the methods of achievement. Although there is no explicit reference in this speech to the topic of extremism, there is an undercurrent suggested by some of the language she uses, for example her initial celebration of diversity as an asset to the country is later offset by her reference to global tensions ‘being reflected on the streets of local communities’. Her more robust tone later in the speech adopts an uncompromising stance calling for an open and unrestrained debate about managed migration and asylum and referring to the need for responsibilities to accompany rights and for ‘non-negotiable rules’ to be applied to ‘all groups whether new or established’.

**2.29** The speech to the Muslim organisations in October 2006 was delivered by Ruth Kelly in her capacity as Communities Secretary. Again she begins by talking about the ‘successes of our diverse society’. She describes the advantages of living in British society and how this has been ‘enriched’ by the contribution of those who have come to live in the UK. Additionally she points out that all types of discrimination have been outlawed in the UK including that relating to race, faith and gender while everyone is allowed to practice their religion ‘freely’ (Kelly 2006b:1) It is implicit that this situation is not necessarily the case in a number of other countries although Kelly does refer to private comments made to her by British Muslims that **‘Britain is a good place to be a Muslim’** (Kelly 2006b:2) She acknowledges however that there is still much to be done to achieve equality by for example **‘improving education, reducing unemployment, tackling poverty’** (ibid) However Kelly then continues with the key purpose of her speech which is to discuss the issue of extremism within Muslim communities. In broaching the subject she acknowledges the sensitivity of the debate but comments that **‘there is more that holds us together than divides us’** for example she indicates that shared cultural characteristics should include speaking English and an understanding of ‘British history and traditions’ (ibid) Kelly’s ‘non-negotiable’ values are outlined as: respect for the law; freedom of speech; equality of opportunity; respect for others and responsibility towards others; (Kelly 2006b:3).

Kelly expresses the desire for ‘full and frank’ debate but is concerned that this does not lead to criticism of the Government’s foreign policy as anti-Muslim and points to the Government’s record in foreign interventions and its ‘Religious Hatred legislation’ as demonstrating that this is not the case (ibid) She believes therefore that an honest discussion in the interests of achieving ‘religious tolerance and a cohesive society’ should not occasion offence while at the same time recognising that there was likely to be disagreement on some issues (ibid) Finally Kelly directly addresses the problem of extremism in the Muslim community and the need to ‘stand together’ and take on a ‘battle of ideas’. This she says is **‘about us reasserting shared values and winning hearts and minds’** not just about ‘security responses’ (Kelly 2006b:4) She confirms that the tackling of extremists is a shared problem not one to be tackled alone but stresses that without the support of the Muslim organisations **‘we will fail’** (ibid) In her concluding remarks Kelly sets out plans for the future relationships with Muslim organisations which she terms a ‘fundamental rebalancing’ This includes change in funding strategy which favours those organisations which **‘take a proactive leadership role in tackling extremism and defending our shared values’** (Kelly 2006b:5) However she does acknowledge in her final comments that Muslim communities across the country are already ‘making a difference’ by for example becoming involved in a number of projects including ‘programmes that build bridges between communities’ and ‘active civic and democratic engagement’ as well as specific initiatives to promote ‘de-radicalisation’ of younger people through more enlightened education and targeted mentoring/guidance.

The purpose of Ruth Kelly’s message in this speech is clear. Nevertheless there are still signs that the building of community cohesion (and social capital) is seen by the Government as one of the ways to help solve one of the most acute and serious social problems it was facing at the time. As Kelly is addressing the Muslim organisations the need for political sensitivity is paramount however she manages to balance the twin objectives of maintaining a positive and constructive approach towards the advantages of living in a diverse society while at the same time encouraging collaborative action to tackle extremists in some of the more volatile communities. Kelly’s speaking style helps here as she is naturally direct and forthright so less likely to offend when she makes some of her more prescriptive remarks. For example when she refers to ‘shared cultural characteristics’ as including speaking English and understanding ‘British history and traditions’ she prefaces this comment by the inclusive ‘there is more that holds us together than divides us’.

**2.30** Tony Blair’s speech in December of the same year starts by outlining Britain’s and the Labour Government’s achievements over the previous 30 years in producing **‘the most comprehensive panoply of anti-discrimination legislation in the world’** (Blair 2006:2) He quotes Trevor Philips, the Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality as saying that **‘Britain was by far the best place to live in Europe , if you are not white’** (ibid) In addition a recent MORI poll had confirmed that attitudes relating to race and ethnicity had improved considerably over the previous five years and were substantially more positive than some European countries (ibid) Despite this British citizens had launched a terrorist attack on London, the perpetrators having not ‘shared values’ but **‘separate ones, values based on a warped distortion of the faith of Islam’** (Blair 2006:3) This Blair believes has thrown the notion of ‘multicultural’ Britain and its diversity into a different light. He suggests that Britain’s tolerance of difference and diverse culture has been exploited and that ultimately a reaction would be **‘we’re not going to be taken for a ride’** (ibid) He then continues by defining what he means by ‘integration’ – not ‘culture or lifestyle’ but ‘values and **‘the rights and duties that go along with being a member of our society’** (ibid) The values he refers to are: belief in democracy; the rule of law; tolerance; equal treatment for all; respect for this country and its shared heritage. Blair believes that **‘integrating people while preserving their distinctive cultures.....is the norm’** (Blair 2006:4) pointing out that being part of a multicultural society was always **‘implicitly balanced by a duty to integrate...’** (ibid) This duty now needed to be ‘reasserted’. He proposes that this should be accomplished by ‘open’ discussion and by defining the common values with which citizens are expected to comply. He also outlines a number of policy initiatives to reinforce the ‘duty to integrate’ message. These include a more judicious provision of grants to community racial and religious groups (see also Kelly 2006b:5) but also more stringent provisions regarding certain cultural aspects of minority communities which are perceived to undermine British laws and values (Blair 2006:5) Blair highlights the importance of emphasising integration in the national curriculum for schools and the promotion of ‘twinning’ schools of different faiths to encourage bridging between cultures (Blair 2006:6) Finally he refers to the importance of sharing a ‘common language’ and intends to introduce a requirement that speaking English be a condition of British citizenship (ibid)

In setting out these demands Blair acknowledges the ‘social and economic dimension to extremism’ but states that this ‘cannot be permitted as an excuse’ (ibid) He talks of the progress that has been made in tackling disadvantage and the continuing efforts to achieve equality of opportunity (Blair 2006:7) however this is not sufficient to solve the problem. What is required is **‘an act of collective leadership from us all and, in particular, from the leaders of the main religious and racial groups......’** (ibid) He concludes by saying that **‘we are not on our own in trying to find the right balance between integration and diversity’** however his final message is robust: **‘Our tolerance is part of what makes Britain, Britain. So conform to it; or don’t come here’** (Blair 2006:8).

Tony Blair’s speech was delivered towards the end of his premiership and two months after the speech by Ruth Kelly to the Muslim organisations so it is not surprising that the theme of integration, couched as a ‘duty’ should form a central part of his message. His definition of integration as signifying values rather than ‘culture or lifestyle’ together with his forceful condemnation of those refusing to comply is underlined by a number of proposed policy initiatives designed to reinforce the ‘duty to integrate’ message, including the introduction of a provision that speaking English should be a condition of British citizenship. In many ways the discourse does not differ very much from that already propounded by Ruth Kelly however the approach is much more ‘draconian’. The theme of integration in Tony Blair’s speech appears to place the main onus on British immigrants to adapt to UK society rather than to suggest that integration should be a shared responsibility within all communities. This implies a change of Government policy to move towards a process of assimilation, a much more authoritarian line than had previously been adopted. However the Commission on Integration and Cohesion were to produce their interim statement in early 2007 after some months of local consultation and their views on integration were not consistent with this more hard line approach.

**2.31 (a) Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007) Our Interim Statement**

**(b) Darra Singh (21/02/2007) Speech at the launch of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion –Interim Statement**

**(c) Ruth Kelly (21/02/2007) Speech at the launch of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion – Interim Statement**

The Commission on Integration and Cohesion, an independent advisory group appointed by the Communities Secretary, had been asked to examine possible causes of tension and conflict in areas where there was community segregation; to advise how local leadership could overcome perceived barriers to integration and cohesion; to explore ways in which local communities might themselves take on the challenge of confronting ‘extremist ideologies’ in their midst and to recommend capacity building approaches which could help local communities to tackle their own problems and cope with conflict (CICC 2007:36) The Interim Statement outlined the direction of the Commission’s thinking based on the consultations that had taken place so far summarising their overall conviction that **‘work to build integration and cohesion has to be both local and practical to unify communities’** (CICC 2007:6) In describing the context of their investigation the Commission noted that the debate on community cohesion had ‘moved on’ from the original concerns brought about by the civic disturbances in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham in 2001 and had developed into a national debate **‘with wider reach and wider importance’** (CICC 2007:8) However some of the more recent issues raised during the consultations with local people included the view that integration and cohesion should be about everyone **‘....finding ways to interact and engage positively for the common good’** and not just Muslims. This was in response to the ongoing high profile public debate which had sought to place the responsibility for integration into the community on Muslims alone (CICC 2007:9)

The Commission were at pains to interpret the national and ‘often controversial’ debates into a local context which would provide practical support for local communities struggling to come to terms with these issues on a day-to-day basis. Thus the Commission saw its task as framing any national recommendations from the perspective of ‘local voice, local priorities, or from barriers to local action’ (CICC 2007:10) One of the key areas they addressed was the definition of ‘integration and cohesion’ discovering that at local level people did not identify with the **‘jargon around the current integration and cohesion debate’.** Local people when asked to define ‘cohesion’ used phrases such as ‘creating supportive communities’ where ‘everybody feels at home’ and ‘sticks together’ (CICC 2007:12) When discussing the definition of ‘integration’ people were confused between their own understanding of the term as a ‘two-way process’ and the media approach which was perceived as advocating assimilation. The Commission however opposed strongly **‘any notion of integration based on assimilation or forced loss of distinctive aspects of group or individual identity’** (CICC 2007:13) There was therefore in the Commission’s view a need to create more ‘user-friendly’ definitions of integration and cohesion comprising the five elements of engagement and participation; meaningful interaction across groups; respect for diversity and social trust; solidarity and collective community action; and equality of opportunity, access, treatment and services (ibid)

The Commission also found during the consultation stage that competition for scarce resources such as housing, jobs, welfare payments and public grants was still a major issue which local authorities and businesses needed to do more to address (CICC 2007:17) while an inability to speak English was the ‘most commonly identified barrier’ to ‘being English’ and therefore English language skills were considered crucial to integration and cohesion, for social reasons as well as economic (CICC 2007:18) Tackling inequality and deprivation was also a pre-requisite for integration and cohesion but interestingly residential and educational segregation were seen as less important barriers to integration and cohesion than the lack of social and leisure opportunities where the third sector in particular should be encouraged to play a more significant role. ‘Meaningful and sustained’ interaction could also be built around practical neighbourhood projects for example and involve a whole range of facilitating bodies such as local leaders, schools, employers, faith communities and the media (CICC 2007:28)

The Commission in focusing on the topic of shared values and ‘Britishness’ were impressed by the results of one of their surveys that showed 82% of respondents as being proud of their local neighbourhood (CICC 2007:30) This prompted the conclusion that any debate about shared values and Britishness should be approached from a local perspective and build from a ‘grass roots’ level (CICC 2007:31) Further work planned before reporting in full later in the year would include discussions on political trust and community participation; the challenges posed to communities by extremism; tackling negative attitudes, perceptions and behaviours (including racism); and local leadership and vision.

**2.32** Darra Singh the Chair of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion spoke at the launch of the Commission’s Interim Statement to introduce the paper. He explained why the Commission had been set up, namely to think about ways to build community cohesion across the country, to examine why cohesion worked in some places and not in others and recommend practical solutions. Consultations had so far taken place with over 1000 people from which over 500 responses had been received however there was further research still to be undertaken and visits made before the final report could be submitted. In the meantime he would elaborate on the key themes that had emerged from the consultation process particularly about the need for everyone who settled in England to speak English which had been mentioned as a key barrier by 60% of those asked. Another finding was the ‘strong link’ between the extent of community cohesion and the level of community deprivation whilst it had also been pointed out that divisions in a community could arise as much from what people had in common as their differences owing to the need to compete for the same limited resources such as access to public services (Singh 2007:1) It was time to rethink the approach to cohesion and question whether **‘efforts to respect difference are inadvertently leaving some communities out in the cold’** (ibid) This included disposing of the term ‘multiculturalism’ which **‘belongs in 1967 and not 2007’** (ibid) What integration and cohesion ‘really means to people’ is **‘shared futures’** (ibid) Singh then goes on to explore in more detail what he has identified as the three main barriers to integration and cohesion (Singh 2007:2) In the first place he asserts that deprivation whereby individuals and groups suffer ‘unequal life chances’ and ‘persistent poverty’ will adversely affect community cohesion. Secondly he maintains that ’competition for shared resources’ where there are concerns about other groups ‘getting a better deal’ will also undermine community cohesion. However the third and greatest barrier is the failure to speak English and Singh devotes a substantial part of the rest of his speech to this perceived major drawback to integration and cohesion. In his view central government, local authorities and employers should take the lead in ensuring that those migrants who did not speak English were given the opportunity to learn and there were many instances where this was already happening (Singh 2007:3) However he was concerned about the lack of incentive and opportunities for non-English speaking spouses and family members coming to the UK to join settled relatives as he perceived the failure to learn English within this group would have repercussions for future generations and thus longer-term community integration and cohesion. In his own personal view a possible solution was to require spouses for example to learn English before arrival in the UK (ibid) The final report would also address the related issue of translation services and when and how these should be used (Singh 2007:4) In his concluding comments Singh referred to two other principal themes the first being: **‘the importance of focusing on the local, while recognising the impact of national narratives’** as it appeared people tended to identify most with their ‘immediate neighbourhood’. This meant that any system of shared values developed at national level to build ‘cohesion and integration’ would need to take account of how people interpreted these values at a local level (ibid) The second major issue related to **‘the best ways to bring people together’** which the Commission believed should focus on improving opportunities for ‘everyday interactions’ such as those already taking place in schools, colleges and the workplace as well as attempting to create more inter-community contact through social and leisure activities. Government and the third sector could be particularly influential in facilitating such initiatives (Singh 2007:4-5) Singh then referred finally to the next stages of the consultation towards the final report which included further research into existing good practice which could lead to the formulation of a useful checklist for other local areas to follow (Singh 2007:5)

**2.33** Ruth Kelly’s speech was a response to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion Interim Statement and also to the preceding speech of Darra Singh Chair of the Commission who had introduced the report. Kelly starts by defining integration and cohesion as **‘fundamentally about a very simple question: how we live together – in all our diversity, with our different backgrounds and beliefs’** (Kelly 2007:1) She endorses the ‘sound principles’ on which the Commission’s work has been based so far and agrees that a new approach to the issue is now required pointing out that radical changes to the patterns of migration over the past forty years demand a policy re-think. Kelly also reinforces values she has previously expressed: respect for the rule of law; freedom of speech; equality of opportunity; respect for others; responsibility for others (Kelly 2007:2 and see also Kelly 2006b:3 on ‘non-negotiable’ values in addressing the Muslim organisations) For good measure she adds to these ‘non-negotiable’ core values **‘distinctly British traditions like -respect for difference, recognising all faiths, the importance of voluntary organisations and a deep sense of fairness’** (ibid) Kelly also agrees with the Commissions stance about removing the barriers to integration and cohesion by being **‘unrelenting in our fight against the poverty and deprivation that are the surest breeding ground for intolerance’** (ibid) She notes the Commission will be making recommendations in its final report about the role of the English language which the Government will study ‘carefully’ before responding. However she particularly looks forward to the proposals on translation as she fears that up to now the balance may have tipped too far to **‘promote independence and inclusion in British society’** (Kelly 2007:3) Kelly next addresses the key theme put forward by the Commission of taking the responsibility of building integration and cohesion more into the local realm stating that ‘**it is civic leadership at local level that can find ways to make communities better’** (ibid) This leads her into the question of engaging with ‘grass roots’ organisations and funding issues, particularly towards helping local communities **‘fight violent Islamist extremism’** (Kelly 2007:4) She also refers to ‘far- right ‘ extremism which seeks to exploit divisions in society most commonly at local community level. As a result she is ‘determined’ to ensure the Government increase the pace of its efforts to ‘tackle far-right extremists’ (ibid) Such a strategy will involve supporting groups and local leaders who are for a more communities (Kelly 2007:4-5) The Government is therefore continuing its work with the Institute of Community Cohesion and the Media Trust to communicate better with local authorities and community groups and to build the former’s ‘expertise and confidence’ in dealing with far-right propaganda (Kelly 2007:5) In her concluding remarks Kelly again endorses the Commission’s work and ultimate purpose stating that she is looking forward to ‘strong recommendations’ to follow up a ‘strong analysis’

**2.32** In summary the Commission’s Interim Statement has clearly indicated the direction in which it is headed with a strong focus on what people want at local level. The speeches by both Darra Singh and Ruth Kelly while endorsing the Commission’s work have also taken the opportunity of emphasising and to some extent reinterpreting the issues with which they are mainly pre-occupied but which do not necessarily find similar prominence or even the same meaning in the Commission’s report. For example Darra Singh focuses on the importance of learning English not only for economic reasons but for social and cultural purposes while Ruth Kelly again ‘beats the drum’ about tackling ‘violent Islamist extremism’ whereas on the whole the Commission’s Interim Statement takes a measured stance about the range of issues involved and is particularly convincing in its depiction of the views of local people with their ambivalent attitudes towards the ‘integration and cohesion debate’ This local emphasis points towards a preference for a more ‘bottom-up’ or ‘grass roots’ approach than has so far been adopted yet such a predilection is certainly not reflected in Kelly’s speech for example. There are therefore interesting comparisons to be made between the contents of formal Government commissioned reports and the balance struck by politicians in associated speeches they make on the subjects concerned. While not a surprising finding, this does have implications for potential power inequalities as represented by the relative influence of for example a high profile political speech as against a well-researched and professionally produced official document.

**2.33 Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007) Our Shared Futures – Final Report**

**‘A past built on difference, a future which is shared’ (**CICC 2007: 3) Thus begins the foreword of the final report of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion chaired by Darra Singh signalling the Commission’s ‘vision of society’ as one which stresses what people have in common rather than what makes them different. The direction of the thinking outlined in the Interim statement is followed up and fully elaborated in the 57 recommendations which result from the wide-ranging research and consultations undertaken over the previous nine months. Darra Singh makes clear in his introductory statement to the report that the ‘shared future’ envisaged has been formulated on the basis of a few ‘key principles’ namely **‘those of rights and responsibilities, visible social justice and the somewhat old fashioned sounding ethics of hospitality’** (CICC 2007:5) The report sets out ‘practical’ proposalsfor building integration and cohesion at local level and details the analysis that has been carried out and evidence obtained to underpin its conclusions, including data from specially commissioned surveys as well as secondary sources. The Commission also produces a new definition of the terms integration and cohesion arguing that although these are interrelated they do not mean the same thing (CICC 2007:9-10) In addition the definition needs to be more relevant to people in varying local circumstances as they strive to interpret and put into practice the day-to-day application of these concepts. The report explains that cohesion is **‘principally the process that must happen in all communities to ensure different groups of people get on well together; while integration is principally the process that ensures new residents and existing residents adapt to one another’** (CICC 2007:9) In addition the report helpfully clarifies the Commission’s stance on what cohesion and integration are **not** about. **‘We also want to make it clear that cohesion is not just about race and faith, and that integration in particular is not about assimilation’** (ibid)

**2.34** This widening of the debate about integration and cohesion into mainstream territory and its emphasis on the importance of local relevance has the effect of moving the discussion away somewhat from some of the more controversial discourses that the Government had previously been promoting such as the need for communities to deal with political extremism (CICC 2007:15) The Commission also points out that, unlike earlier reports on community cohesion, their investigation has not been conducted ‘at a time of crisis’ or in immediate response to particular ‘disturbances or events’ thus in their view justifying the decision to adopt a broader perspective in their approach to the assignment (ibid) The report also makes clear that a ‘one size fits all’ solution for integration and cohesion is not appropriate in view of the differing natures of the local communities, including such factors as demographic profiles, socio-economic circumstances, immigration patterns and the existence and level of tensions between various ethnic groups within each area (CICC 2007:17) For example in looking at the potential impact of deprivation on community cohesion the Commission concluded that while the former remained a ‘key influencer’, **‘the fact that some areas have high deprivation and high cohesion shows that local action can build resilience to its effects’** (CICC 2007:27) Similarly it was found that although the level of diversity in an area could negatively affect cohesion, this was only in ‘particular local circumstances’ such as a **‘lack of experience of diversity and when diversity is linked to deprivation’** (CICC 2007:30)

The final report of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion appears to have moved away from the more stringent measures which had been recently advocated by Government in response to the perceived threat of ‘violent extremism’ Despite the previous rhetoric of high profile politicians and their insistence on the ‘duty to integrate’ as commanded for example by former Prime Minister Tony Blair, the Commission have made it clear they are not talking about assimilation and there is a full explanation and a newer, more intelligible interpretation of what is meant by integration and cohesion which places the responsibility on everyone to adapt to each other within their communities and not rely solely on immigrants to adjust to their host country. The recommendations which are based on the results of extensive local consultation evidently recognise that a ‘one size fits all’ solution for building community cohesion will not be appropriate, thus potentially setting the scene for a more positive and realistic approach to the creation of social capital.

**2.35 Department for Communities and Local Government Report (2008) Face to Face and Side By Side – A Framework for Interfaith Dialogue and Social Action**

This report has major significance in that it opens up the opportunity for widespread expansion of dialogue between communities through a deliberate policy to create social capital ‘bridging’ and ‘linking’ connections by building on existing positive relationships and working arrangements between faiths and interfaith networks. This strategy is perceived as having potential for the spread of social capital as it draws from the evidence of the 2001 census that over three quarters of those surveyed considered themselves to have a faith which in many cases was ‘active ‘rather than ‘passive’ (CLG 2008:5) The Government was already consulting at national level with faith organisations through the Faith Communities Consultative Council and intended to support relationships at regional and local level between government and interfaith organisations to **‘ensure that the relationship is based upon an informed, challenging, consultative and collaborative approach’** (CLG 2008:6) In addition the 2007 report of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion ‘Our Shared Futures’ had argued that in order to achieve effective integration and cohesion there needed to be ‘more constructive relationships’ between those who were religious and those who were not. The Government had therefore taken this proposal on board and committed themselves to the pursuit of **‘an interfaith strategy-our framework for partnership’** (CLG 2008:8) The report, or ‘Framework for Partnership’, is constructed around four ‘building blocks’ which each focus on a different aspect of promoting ‘effective dialogue and social action’ between people of different faiths (CLG 2008:9) It was important that interaction should be ‘meaningful’ as opposed to superficial whereby **‘conversations go beyond surface friendliness......people share a common goal or share an interest.......contact is sustained long term’** (CLG 2008:15) In recognising that the major faiths share a belief in the benefits of social action and that their organisations are already providing voluntary services and practical support to their communities, the report emphasises the contribution these activities are making to the ‘building of social capital’ The ‘building blocks’ identified to promote ‘effective dialogue and social action’ within communities are based partly on research into social capital within faith communities previously carried out for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and also draw on specially commissioned research by the Faith Based Regeneration Network on the contribution made by ‘faith based social action’ to social capital (CLG 2008:23).

**2.36** In the first ‘building block’ the report, in advising how to develop the confidence and skills to ‘bridge’ and ‘link’, explains what is meant by social capital and its three categories of bonding, bridging and linking. Social capital is defined as **‘the “social glue” between people, organisations and communities that enables them to work together to pursue shared objectives. It also brings benefits to people, organisations and communities, as it provides networks of support and opportunity’** (CLG 2008:26) Although too much bonding may be unhelpful to cohesion it is noted that even in single faith communities the more healthy bridging links are apparent where these comprise people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds as well as an age and gender mix for example (CLG 2008:27) There are also many ways in which faith communities can increase social capital **‘making a valuable contribution to community empowerment and engagement...’** (CLG 2008:28)Some barriers to bridging and linking were identified through the consultation process with the faith organisations and included such factors as nervousness about causing offence; inadequate access to local ‘skilled facilitation and capacity building’ resources; and need for support in dealing with the media (CLG 2008:31) The Government would however respond to all these concerns by implementing the appropriate practical measures in addition to providing the necessary funding to support the overall strategy. The report details resources to be made available to local government and communities and provides a wide range of existing ‘good practice’ examples to promote the development of both bridging and linking social capital and to stimulate further the building of effective relationships between faith communities and with the wider society including non-religious citizens and the various decision-making institutions that affect their everyday lives.

The Government is here starting to put into practice the commitment to achieve community cohesion by way of building social capital in communities. The report by the Department for Communities and Local Government is now quite explicit in advising faiths and interfaith networks on how to construct ‘bridging’ and ‘linking’ connections based on existing community relationships and it continues the themes already introduced in the report of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion ‘Our Shared Futures’ using the latter’s recommendations as a springboard for further policy development in this area. The Government has opted to use faith networks to spread social capital on the basis of the 2001 census which identified 75% of respondents as having some form of faith. They also see this as an ideal opportunity to encourage links between those who are religious and those who are not in line with the CIC view that effective integration and cohesion are more likely to be achieved by the formation of positive and constructive relationships between these two groups. The fact that faith groups and interfaith networks have long been active in the voluntary sector and have already been in the process of establishing cross-community connections in order to provide much needed services particularly to the disadvantaged and marginalised will no doubt have influenced Government tactics in pursuing this course of action, nevertheless they would naturally hope that their earlier efforts to forge strong working relationships with the faith organisations through initiating top-level consultations and negotiations together with the continuing role of the Faith Communities Unit would bear fruit in the form of increased social capital and mark a further step towards their ultimate goal of community cohesion.

**2.37 Department for Communities and Local Government (2009) Tackling race inequalities: A discussion document**

This document reviews the progress that the Government had made over the previous ten years in tackling race inequality and attempts to consolidate the achievements accomplished to date at the same time consulting about some of the issues still outstanding. The Government wished to look again at its priorities and refocus its resources in the light of the global economic challenges now facing the country (CLG 2009:4) Despite the substantial improvements in attitudes towards racism and discrimination, there were still concerns which needed to be addressed such as the disproportionately high number of black and minority ethnic individuals caught up within the criminal justice system in contrast to the low representation of minorities employed or occupying senior positions in various public institutions such as the police and judicial services. As in previous consultative documents questions about a possible future strategy are posed and various options set out for consideration and discussion by a whole range of organisations including charities, voluntary bodies, local authorities and businesses etc where the main expertise and experience of dealing with these issues are presumed to be found. Once again also ‘interesting’ case studies are distributed throughout the document illustrating various local projects which demonstrate different ways in which the lives of black and minority ethnic people have been improved.

The proposed consultation was to be widespread and include also any members of the public who might be interested. It aimed to **‘identify the priority areas that still need to be addressed’** (CLG 2009:9) The document’s purpose was to provide a framework for the debate which would build on the previous report ‘Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society’ and take into account the changes that had occurred since the latter’s publication in 2005. The report also reviewed the history of race legislation in the UK referring to the Equality and Human Rights Commission which was shortly to replace the longstanding Commission for Racial Equality (CLG 2009:11) Despite the wealth of existing anti-discrimination legislation on the grounds of race, ethnicity and more recently religion **‘many people from ethnic minority communities continue to experience racism, disadvantage and discrimination’** (CLG 2009:13) Proposals specifically for dealing with poverty and disadvantage had already been put forward in separate reports, however the question of the particular problems being faced by ‘Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities would be addressed in the current discussion paper (CLG 2009:14)

The ultimate aim of the consultation was to bring together all equality legislation into a single Act **‘regardless of race, disability, gender, religion or belief, age or sexual orientation’** and was apparently part of the Government’s longer term strategy to provide the ‘level playing field’ on which to build community cohesion (CLG 2009:19) This move towards consolidating their overall approach replicates that indicated by the earlier report ‘Face to Face and Side by Side’ whereby community cohesion was to be achieved by creating social capital from the relationships and social action of faith groups being linked into wider civic society. For example the discussion document on tackling race inequalities makes specific mention of the aim to increase the representation of Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups in ‘democratic and civic institutions’ (CLG 2009:36) – further evidence of the direction they wished to take.

**2.38 (a) John Denham (14/10/2009) Speech to launch Connecting Communities Programme**

**(b) John Denham (14/01/2010) Speech to launch Tackling Race Inequality Strategy document**

In October 2009 the then Secretary for Communities and Local Government spoke about the new Connecting Communities programme which was being introduced to address the problems and challenges still being faced by a number of communities in the UK especially in the context of the economic recession, stating in his opening remarks that **‘These are communities which were least likely to prosper when the economy was booming. They are most vulnerable to recession’** (Denham 2009:1) He refers to the perceptions of inequitable treatment by groups in the communities who **‘worry that others are, unfairly, doing better’** which can lead to **‘resentment or worse’** (ibid) a factor that is undermining progress towards the achievement of community cohesion. While admitting that ‘things could have been done better’ Denham nevertheless defends the Government’s record in terms of the ‘effort’ and ‘investment’ it has made to support many areas (Denham 2009:2) Communities may be feeling ‘disconnected’ but he points out that is not the same as being ‘neglected’ (ibid) He then goes on to list the various Government initiatives whereby many communities have **‘benefited from unprecedented investment’** and notes that although economic and social changes may have modified the potential advantages **‘this does not mean that government investment has failed or been wasted’** (ibid) Denham then addresses the issue of local and national leadership which must be ‘more effective’ in responding to people’s concerns pointing out that national decision-makers should be more sensitive to what feels ‘comfortable’ at local level (Denham 2009:3) Similarly there needed to be an honest recognition about **‘the unintended consequences of good policy’** (Denham 2009:4)In this Denham is referring to the problems which have arisen in the ‘white’ communities about the perceived preferential ‘equality’ measures being put in place for the black and minority ethnic groups. He also mentions the continuing importance of class which **‘politics of identity ignores....at its peril’** (ibid)

**2.39** Denham then continues by regretting that **‘despite a forest of consultation’** there has been so little progress made locally or nationally in empowering communities to participate fully in the way their day-to-day services are planned or delivered. While he recognises the ‘exceptional’ challenges facing local leadership, he believes more should be done to ‘support’ and ‘strengthen’ them (ibid) Failure of leadership could ultimately result in ‘real’ dangers to the communities concerned and **‘to wider community cohesion’** (Denham 2009:5) Denham then explains what the Connecting Communities Programme is designed to accomplish, including the provision of an opportunity for people to **‘express fears and concerns openly and honestly’**  and to be given **‘the ability to influence how resources- like jobs and housing –are allocated’** (ibid) He recognises that although there have been many essential initiatives at national level they **‘will not achieve their potential if they remain national initiatives’** (ibid) The intention with the programme therefore would be to identify and prioritise those communities which could benefit from substantial new ‘focus and investment’ and to support them financially in their attempts to tackle the issues that were of most concern to them (Denham 2009:6) This would help ensure all communities feel that they were being treated fairly (ibid) In conclusion Denham summarises the three major aspects to the programme as improving the quality of local leadership; enabling people to openly air their grievances and have confidence that these would be addressed; and ensuring that people were made fully aware of existing facilities available in their area and the initiatives being taken to increase opportunities such as regeneration projects etc. (Denham 2009:7) Finally he warns that if the way resources are spent ‘causes resentment’ or the approach to policy implementation **‘actually undermines community cohesion’** this may **‘do more harm than good’** (ibid)

**2.40** John Denham’s speech to launch the strategy document on Tackling Race Inequality was delivered at the beginning of 2010 and shortly before the General Election which would see the Labour Government being replaced by the new Coalition Government. Following his preliminary remarks to introduce the document, which had been produced following a widespread consultation process, he talked about some of the achievements in race equality legislation over the previous decade starting with the Race Relations Amendment Act which had **‘utterly changed the standards that Black and Minority Communities can expect from public services – whether in education, in health care, or in the criminal justice system’** (Denham 2010:1) He mentioned the investment in community organisations to help improve their ‘leadership capacity’ and also the promotion of diversity across the public sector for example there were **‘more Black and Minority Ethnic people in senior leadership positions in the Civil Service than ever before’** (Denham 2010:2) In addition a more concentrated focus on the police and criminal justice system had resulted in better representation of Black and Minority Ethnic communities employed in these services and their having greater confidence in being treated fairly (ibid) Denham stressed however that the Government had **‘championed equality for all’**  and had also worked ‘tirelessly’ to reduce poverty as well as **‘turned around some of our most deprived communities’** (ibid) He also acknowledges the equal commitment and contribution made by the organisations represented at the launch and assures those who have expressed concern that the work to **‘combat racism and promote race equality’** has not ‘dropped down’ the Government’s agenda (ibid) Denham refutes the criticism that the programme is too expensive in view of the economic downturn stating that inequality and discrimination at work leads to wasted talent and opportunities which **‘we cannot afford’** (Denham 2010:3) He also points out that there are continuing challenges still to be met giving as examples the disproportionately high levels of young black boys and young black men excluded from school or being subject to the ‘stop and search’ powers of the criminal justice system (ibid)

**2.41** In turning to the wider debate on race combined with factors such as **‘economics, religious identity and migration’** Denham suggests this recipe can **‘undermine community stability and lead to communities living separate and parallel lives’** (ibid) He refers also to the ‘renewed recognition’ of the importance of class and the contribution of multiple disadvantage for example race interacting with poverty as opposed to race alone. The Government’s new Equalities bill therefore promotes equality for everyone rather than singling out groups for priority or special treatment (Denham 2010:4) In summarising the Tackling Race Inequalities strategy and the way in which it is to be implemented Denham outlines the various measures to be carried out including the monitoring of public services to ensure their compliance with their ‘duties and obligations’; liaising with the Equality and Human Rights Commission on legal cases; rigorously pursuing other Government Departments to incorporate race equality in ‘everything they do’; and taking the lead on CLG responsibilities particularly in the areas of ‘housing, regeneration and civic participation’(ibid) In his concluding comments Denham again refers to the achievements over the past decade and Britain’s status as **‘a society much more comfortable with diversity than ever before’** (Denham 2010:5) While society was not yet free of ‘prejudice, discrimination and inequality’ the Government would not **‘rest until we have built that society’**

If John Denham’s two speeches seem particularly defensive in their emphasis on the Government’s record this does not detract from the substantial contribution made by them since the beginning of the decade in improving racial and other equalities and introducing a number of major initiatives to promote community cohesion. At the latter stages of Labour’s political rule and with the onset of a severe global economic crisis, the overall impression is one of attempting to reconcile the ‘good’ national strategy of building a better society with the ‘unintended consequences’ of well-meaning policies failing to make the necessary progress at community level due in the main to poor quality local leadership as well as the influence of changes in the wider economic and social forces which occurred during the period in question.

The next section will address the continuing theme of community cohesion and social capital from the perspective of the Coalition Government who came to power in May 2010.

END OF SECTION TWO

**SECTION 3**

**SOCIAL CAPITAL AND THE COALITION**

**Introduction**

**3.1** The theme of social capital and its contribution to the thinking of the British Government is continued with an analytical review of selected material produced by the Coalition since the latter came to power in May 2010. Initially there will also be an inspection of two speeches of David Cameron which immediately preceded the election together with the Conservative Manifesto as these are deemed to have a particularly significant bearing on many of the subsequent policies and statements which have since emerged from the Coalition Government, particularly in relation to the Big Society, the creation of which has been spoken of as a ‘passion’ by the present Prime Minister. However linking the concept of Cameron’s Big Society and social capital as visualised by New Labour is not as straightforward as might be imagined at first glance, even though the work of Robert Putnam on social capital in for example ‘Bowling Alone’ and (with Lewis Feldstein) ‘Better Together’ might appear to have exerted a strong influence on the UK’s political leadership over the last ten to fifteen years. One commentator has noted the similarity between the case studies outlined in Putnam and Feldstein’s book which documented examples of social capital ‘successes’, whereby various groups of people had managed to collectively solve problems in their community, and empirical accounts of ‘good practice’ in social activism by local communities in the UK which had been carried out over an equivalent time period (see for example Morgan 2011) Certainly parallels may be drawn between Putnam and Feldstein’s vision of social capital succeeding at grass roots level and the many and diverse community projects that have been taking place in Britain in the last decade or so. However the evidence is not clear that David Cameron and the Coalition have taken their inspiration from Putnam or even that the creation of social capital is a key policy objective. At best the Big Society if realised in the form envisaged by the current Government may provide as one of its outcomes the social cohesion which is achieved through the building of ‘bridging’ and ‘linking’ ties between individuals and communities as a by-product of working to a common purpose. In this respect, and in contrast to the previous Government’s approach, increased social capital could rather be one of the results of the Coalition’s strategy as opposed to the means by which it has been fulfilled.

**3.2** In reviewing the Coalition’s plans to dismantle ‘Big Government’ and reconstruct society along radically different lines the intention will therefore be to assess whether there are any genuine signs of a commitment to repair ‘broken Britain’ through a ‘bottom-up’ approach to community building or whether such an aspiration is likely to be diverted to short term political ends as a result of the perceived need to make substantial expenditure cuts and in particular to drastically reduce the public sector deficit, a measure which if rapidly executed could conflict with this declared objective. If however the Government’s Big Society agenda is found upon inspection of the key documents and statements relevant to this issue to demonstrate a consistent approach towards achieving community cohesion, it might be possible to identify some continuity between their policies regarding the significance of social capital and those of the previous Government, albeit from different ideological standpoints.

In conducting the review of Coalition material 19 relevant documents and speeches have been selected for analysis covering the period between November 2009 and the present. David Cameron’s speech at the outset of the review period was delivered before the beginning of the 2010 election campaign and although Britain was already in recession the then leader of the opposition would not have been fully aware of the Government’s financial position at that time nor could he have anticipated the outcome of the election which saw the formation of a governing coalition between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats with the inevitable consequences which that alliance was likely to entail. Despite the immense accumulation of knowledge and expertise on social capital theory and the wide experience acquired by the Labour Government over the previous 13 years in applying such principles in their attempts to build community cohesion - information which would have been available to the Coalition once it had acceded to power- it is debatable whether or to what extent such resources may have been called upon, given the inclination of this Government to distance itself from its predecessor. Nevertheless specialist bodies such as the Community Cohesion Unit, which were established during New Labour’s regime would be in a position to provide a wealth of background intelligence from which the Coalition could well have benefited in their potential move towards a more cohesive society.

**3.3 (a) Speech by David Cameron on the Big Society at the Hugo Young Foundation delivered 10 November 2009**

**(b) Conservative Manifesto (2010)**

**(c) Speech by David Cameron on Big Society versus Big Government delivered prior to the 2010 election 19 April 2010**

David Cameron’s speech at the Hugo Young Foundation begins by picking up a key theme from the 2009 Conservative Party Conference as he criticises **‘the size, scope and role of the state’** as now having an adverse effect on **‘the progressive aims of reducing poverty, fighting inequality, and increasing general well-being’** Indeed the ‘growth of the state’ is producing **‘not social solidarity, but selfishness and individualism’** (Cameron 2009:1) He believes priority must be given to **‘empowering and enabling individuals, families and communities’** so as to promote **‘responsibility and opportunity’** (ibid) He argues this can only be achieved by a **‘re-imagined state........actively helping to create the big society’** or in other words a **‘move from state action to social action’**(ibid) Cameron continues to focus on the issues of fairness and equality of opportunity quoting research from ‘The Spirit Level’ by Richard Wilkson and Katie Pickett that demonstrates the significance of the relationship between a country’s per capita GDP and the **‘size of the gap between the richest and poorest in the population’** (Cameron 2009:2) He deplores a situation where there is **‘deep poverty living systematically side by side with great riches’** (ibid) and suggests a focus on the **‘gap between the bottom and the middle...’** so as to improve the chances of a ‘good life’ for the poorest (ibid)

Following a brief historical review of the role of the state in its attempts to create and maintain a fairer society, Cameron concentrates on a critique of the **‘rapid expansion of the state since 1997’** asserting that this has been largely unsuccessful in ‘tackling poverty’ or ‘reducing inequality’ although reluctantly admitting that **‘some progress has been made’** (Cameron 2009:3) On the whole however he claims that society has become **‘more, not less unfair’** under Labour (Cameron 2009:4) He wishes therefore to propose an alternative strategy which includes **‘actively helping to create a stronger, more responsible society’** (ibid) In order to make opportunity more equal he puts forward a number of suggestions which include greater involvement of voluntary bodies and charities in projects such as Sure Start (Cameron 2009:5) He refers to the ‘lost’ ethos of **‘self-improvement, of mutuality, of responsibility’** recalling the creation of the welfare state at a time when **‘the vibrant panoply of civic organisations...meant communities looked out for one another; the co-operatives, the friendly societies, the building societies, the guilds’** (ibid) Cameron then goes on to give a number of examples which illustrate that British society is ‘broken’ in a world where **‘state control is a substitute for moral choice and personal responsibility, obligation and duty...’** before putting forward his suggested alternative for **‘.. an organic and unprompted flourishing of personal responsibility and civic renewal’** (Cameron 2009:6-7). The solution would not however involve a ‘retrenchment’ of the state. Although the **‘alternative to big government is the big society’** the state would be used to **‘remake society’** (Cameron 2009:8)

Cameron’s key proposal for changing society is the redistribution of power and control from the centre to individuals and local communities/neighbourhoods or the lowest practicable ‘tier of government’ on the basic premise that **‘if you give people more responsibility, they behave more responsibly’** (ibid)Such measures would include for example the use of the Local Housing Trusts and the election of **‘new mayors in our big cities acting as a focus for civic pride and responsibility’** (ibid) Decentralisation of power to local communities would be accompanied by the provision of more information to service users and greater accountability by service providers. In creating the big society the ‘new’ state would actively encourage ‘community engagement’ and support the gathering together of **‘families, individuals, charities and communities’** so that they could collectively solve their problems. The state would therefore be used to **‘stimulate social action’** (Cameron 2009:9) Cameron then focuses on the role that social action will play in his vision of the big society. This concept is he asserts already a **‘core part of modern Conservatism.’** (ibid) The ‘strategy’ for social action is to be delivered by three groups: social entrepreneurs, community activists and the majority of the population. The first two groups he explains already exist and are willing to do more. However the big society requires **‘mass engagement: a broad culture of responsibility, mutuality and** **obligation’** (Cameron 2009:11)

Cameron believes that the mobilisation of society towards social action can be effected through a **‘whole culture change’** citing the behavioural psychologist Robert Cialdini who stresses the importance of ‘social norms’ in influencing people’s behaviour (ibid) Cameron also advocates the strengthening of existing civic institutions such as the post office, the local shops and the town hall in order to create ‘tangible’ connections to build **‘trust and strong communities’** A proposed new National Citizens’ Service will **‘help inspire social action and co-operation amongst a new generation of teenagers’** (ibid) He concludes by pointing out that the necessary culture change will take ‘more than a generation’ to complete and emphasises yet again that **‘the era of big government has run its course’** Only a bigger society rather than bigger government can start to reverse the worsening problems of poverty and inequality facing the country.

**3.4** While David Cameron’s speech is permeated with political and ideological rhetoric as might be anticipated in the run-up to an election, it is also significant in the use which is made of ‘social capital’ conceptual language despite the fact that the actual term is never used. The opportunity to recast society in a radical form, an ideological approach, is clothed in ‘Putnamesque’ references to building strong communities, the creation of trust, collective problem solving and local democratic engagement in a political environment which is relatively free of state control and regulation. The term social action can perhaps be regarded here as proxy for social capital while the focus on young people and families recalls James Coleman’s preoccupation with the importance of family ‘bonding’ social capital in the socialisation of children and adolescents. Both ‘bridging’ and ‘linking’ social capital are also implicit in Cameron’s vision of the Big Society in this speech. However other influences also appear to be at work in David Cameron’s perspective on civic renewal. In referring to the Big Society philosophy in general Patrick Diamond of Civitas was to comment that **‘The language of mutuality, solidarity, reciprocity, tradition and faith have been ransacked from Labour’s ideological and intellectual lexicon’** (Diamond 2011:5). Nevertheless the Big Society had already become major feature in David Cameron’s and the Conservative Party’s thinking and was to figure prominently in the Manifesto published at the beginning of 2010.

**3.5 ‘There is such a thing as Society.......It’s just not the same thing as the State’** (Conservative Manifesto 2010)

The Conservative Manifesto devotes a major portion of its content to the Big Society, setting proposals about the ‘new approach’ of ‘**social responsibility, not state control; the Big Society, not big government’** in the context of the Party’s vision of a radically changed society involving the need to ‘mend broken Britain’ (Manifesto 2010:35). Overtly political there is nevertheless a continuing emphasis on using the state to **‘stimulate social action’** to include for example **‘training new community organisers to help achieve our ambition of every adult citizen being a member of an active neighbourhood group’** (Manifesto 2101:37) References to the Big Society, whether explicit or not, abound in every part of the section headed ‘Change Society’ which runs to 20 pages of the full 130 page document while a further directly relevant section ‘Change Politics’ (sub-headed ‘People Power’ and containing 14 pages) means that just over a quarter of the Manifesto addresses wholly social aspects of Governmental activity with an emphasis on the Big Society throughout. As the Manifesto itself states **‘The Big Society runs consistently through our policy programme. Our plans to reform public services, mend our broken society, and rebuild trust in politics are all part of our Big Society agenda’** (Manifesto 2010:37) The Manifesto illustrates how the Conservatives intend to fulfil these promises by outlining a number of key initiatives such as creating a Big Society Bank; introducing a National Citizen Service; using the Big Lottery Fund to support ‘social action through the voluntary and community sector’; and so on (Manifesto 2010:37-39) Families, education and the NHS also covered in this section. Particular reference is made to people being given democratic control in the section on crime which suggests that neighbourhoods will be empowered to challenge their local police services about their crime-fighting performance (Manifesto 2010:57)

The ‘Change Politics’ section continues the theme of local community empowerment as it describes proposed measures for dismantling centralised bureaucratic power in favour of the citizen whether as an individual or member of a neighbourhood or local community. The Conservatives plan to do this by inter alia providing more information to the public; reducing or eliminating ‘red tape’ and devolving power to the lowest practicable level, allowing communities to exercise control over their local services and make decisions about how these should be prioritised and delivered. This includes for example the ability to **‘instigate local referendums on any local issue if 5 per cent of the local population sign up’** while a newcommunity ‘right to buy’ scheme will protect community assets ‘threatened with closure’ (ibid) Greater local democratic control is also to be given to local authorities through a ‘general power of competence’ to ensure that they can better serve their communities as well as being accountable to service users (ibid)

**3.6** The speech made by David Cameron in November 2009 resonates strongly within the Manifesto particularly throughout the sections on changing society and changing politics. A coherent strategy is starting to form here while the big society has evolved into the Big Society seen in opposition to Big Government which has to be eradicated. The Big Society has become an almost taken-for-granted term which no longer needs to be spelled out in every policy declaration. However the Manifesto’s functional purpose as a political ideology is forcefully evident despite the multiple references to ‘people power’ and the increase of democratic control at local and community level. This places social capital as a possible objective in its own right firmly on the ‘back burner’ for the time being. David Cameron’s speech on 19 April under a month before the 2010 election was to erode its potential significance even further.

**3.7** The speech by David Cameron delivered on 19 April 2010 entitled ‘Big Society versus Big Government’ pitches headlong into political campaign territory. He starts by referring to the forthcoming general election as having **‘suddenly got a bit lively’** with the British people taking ‘centre stage’ saying they are **‘fed up with the status quo’** (Cameron 2010a:1) About a third of the way into the speech and following a rundown of the perceived problems facing Britain he mentions that the country needs ‘something different’ and **‘that is where our big idea comes in’** (ibid) The big idea is to build the Big Society in order to effect change. This means **‘we have all got to pull together, work together, come together’** (Cameron 2010a:1-2). Cameron then goes on to explain how change can be brought about by this collective process including an invitation to the **‘social enterprises, the charities and the churches and the other organisations’** to help **‘break open the monopoly of education’** while ‘everyone’s welcome’ in the Big Society (Cameron 2010a:2) This rallying call to arms continues with references to the current state of the economy; government waste and inefficiency; and the need for ‘decisive leadership’(ibid) He praises the contribution of small businesses because above all they epitomise **‘the most important value in our country of all....’** which is **‘responsibility’** a value which leads to **‘our bigger economy and our bigger society’** (Cameron 2010a:3) In Cameron’s view the Big Society cannot be built unless people **‘take more responsibility for themselves, for their families, for their neighbours, for their communities’** (ibid)

**3.8** The Big Society continued to play a significant role in this pre-election speech albeit more of an instrumental one than in the speech delivered at the Hugo Young Foundation in November 2009. There was not unexpectedly a great deal of political and oratorical language often of a robust and direct nature with trenchant criticisms of the Government and repeated admonitions about the poor state of the country taking centre stage. Nevertheless there were still strong signs of a Big Society approach to the Conservative’s plans for future government which were reasonably consistent with previous discourse on the subject. It remained to be seen whether the ‘social capital’ aspects of the policy would survive intact once the Coalition Government came to power.

**3.9** **(a) Building the Big Society (May 2010) Paper issued by Coalition Government following 2010 election**

**(b) Speeches of David Cameron and Nick Clegg (18 May 2010) at Big Society Launch**

**(c) The Coalition: our programme for government (May 2010) – document issued by Coalition at start of new Government**

The Conservative-Liberal Democrat Alliance acted swiftly to form a coalition Government following the 2010 election when the Conservatives failed to secure a majority vote. During May of that year a document entitled ‘Building the Big Society’ was issued confirming the Coalition’s commitment to what had previously been declared as a priority of the Conservative Party and in particular David Cameron, now Prime Minister of the new Government. The statement re-affirmed the intention to **‘put more power and opportunity into people’s hands’.** It said **‘We want to give citizens, communities and local government the power and information they need to come together, solve the problems they face and build the Britain they want’** (Coalition statement 2010)It referred to society as primarily including families, networks, neighbourhoods and communities and stressed that the objective to **‘achieve fairness and opportunity for all’** could only be met if people were given more power and were encouraged to take more responsibility (Coalition statement 2010) The document outlined a number of ‘already agreed’ policies regarding the granting of additional powers to communities, such as the ability to make local planning decisions, take responsibility for local facilities under threat of closure and the right to apply to run local services. To help communities achieve these objectives neighbourhood groups would be created and supported by specially recruited and trained community organisers **‘especially in the most deprived areas’** (ibid) The Government would also encourage people to become active in the community by introducing such measures as a national ‘Big Society Day’ and a National Citizen Service for 16 year olds. There would be devolution of power from central to local government, for example giving back to the latter decision-making powers in relation to housing and planning. In addition the Coalition intended to support the increase of co-operatives (including the setting up of employee-owned bodies) mutuals, charities and social enterprises and encourage them to become more involved in managing public services (Coalition statement 2010) The statement also mentioned the establishment of a Big Society Bank to **‘provide new finance for neighbourhood groups, charities, social enterprises** **and other nongovernmental bodies’**  and the provision of greater accessibility to government maintained information and other locally held statistics such as police crime figures (Coalition statement 2010)

**3.10** This paper reiterated many of the policies which had already been discussed in David Cameron’s previous speeches and the Conservative Manifesto. It distilled the ‘Big Society’ essence from the wider political agenda focusing on the empowerment of the community, the neighbourhood and local government. The language here is ‘society friendly’ and would not be regarded amiss in any ‘social capital’ treatise espousing the views of Robert Putnam or his adherents. The significance of this document is that the Big Society had now become a Coalition policy and would feature as a key commitment in the future thinking of the new Government.

**3.11** The speeches at the launch of the Big Society programme delivered by the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister to a number of representatives from various bodies including the voluntary sector, social enterprises and other non-governmental organisations confirmed from the outset David Cameron’s long-term espousal of the Big Society agenda and coincided with the publication of the first part of the Coalition Agreement. On this occasion David Cameron formally introduced Francis Maude, a minister in the Cabinet Office and Nick Hurd Minister for Civil society as key personnel responsible for taking the programme forward. During his speech David Cameron drew substantially on the ideas contained in the Coalition paper stating that **‘if we want to solve our deepest social problems......it’s going to be the voluntary sector, social enterprises...’** which would be playing the most significant role and therefore this sector would **‘be a bigger part of government than ever’** (Cameron 2010b:1) He also said that the phrase ‘third sector’ would no longer be used. Cameron then outlined the main policies contained in the document to be published which included plans to provide more powers for communities and train community organisers **‘to help actually create the social action of the future’** (ibid) Other initiatives mentioned were the introduction of a National Citizen Service ’**which is about understanding the importance of voluntary work and social contribution’** (ibid) Cameron also referred to the devolution of more power in the first instance to local government but subsequently **‘driven down even further into communities’** (ibid) Part of the agenda would involve the provision of information to accompany the power thereby allowing people to **‘see how a local enterprise or a voluntary body could do better what government already does’** In asking for co-operation in the Big Society initiative, Cameron acknowledged that **‘in the financial situation we’re in, there are going to be difficult decisions for government and government spending’** (ibid) He nevertheless concluded by again confirming his commitment to building the Big Society which he hopes will be **‘one of the great legacies of this government’** (ibid)

Nick Clegg’s speech which followed that of David Cameron was very brief but he pointed out similarities in the approaches of the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats saying that **‘we’ve been using different words for a long time and** **actually mean the same thing....”Liberalism” “Big Society” “Empowerment” “Responsibility“’** Their joint aim for changing British society represents **‘nothing less than a huge cultural shift’** He concludes with an anecdote based on the activities of one of his constituents which he believes illustrates the Big Society working at a grass roots level.

**3.12** These speeches which accompany the publication of a Coalition document on the Big Society and formalise the beginning of the formal Government programme are addressed specifically to the voluntary sector, social enterprise and other community organisations which are being targeted for greater involvement in the Coalition’s plans to devolve power and responsibility to local and neighbourhood level. This is presented as a collaborative exercise which ‘showcases’ the close agreement between the Conservative-Liberal Democrat alliance but also attempts to demonstrate solidarity with the voluntary and social enterprise sectors who are being cajoled into co-operation with Coalition policy. In the meantime however the financial situation facing the new Government ‘lurks in the background’ but is not allowed to undermine the Big Society agenda at this juncture.

**3.13** The Coalition’s programme for government incorporates many of the previously discussed and ‘agreed’ Big Society proposals into its 32 page submission. The Big Society is only mentioned explicitly once, in the joint Foreword presented by the Prime Minister and his Deputy. It is here pointed out that a combination of **‘Conservative plans to strengthen families and encourage social responsibility’** and **‘the Liberal Democrat passion for protecting our civil liberties and stopping the relentless incursion of the state into the lives of individuals’** creates **‘a Big Society matched by big citizens’** (Foreword to The Coalition: our programme for government 2010:8) The overall document contains 31 topics which are covered in strict alphabetical order rather than in terms of political significance thus, for example, Deficit Reduction appears as the 9th item between Defence and Energy and Climate Change. Within this impartially structured format issues related to the Big Society agenda fall mainly under the headings of Social Action (item 27) and Communities and Local Government (item 4) although there are also references to local community empowerment under various other relevant sections such as Crime and Policing (the provision of local crime statistics and holding of ‘beat’ meetings) Government Transparency (the right to request government-held datasets) Justice (Neighbourhood Justice Panels to deal with low-level crime and anti-social behaviour) the NHS and Schools. Sections on Equalities and Families and Children address questions of discrimination, equal pay, community relations, child poverty and provision of help for the neediest families. There is also a section on Political Reform (item 24) which deals with the right for the public to raise petitions for debate in parliament and to instigate referendums on local issues as well as having the opportunity to comment on Parliamentary bills passing through the legislative process (Coalition programme for government 2010:27)

**3.14** Many of the Big Society initiatives are however contained in the section headed Social Action in the introduction to which the Coalition makes clear its belief that **‘the innovation and enthusiasm of civil society is essential in tackling the social, economic and political challenges that the UK faces today’** (Coalition programme for government 2010:29) Accordingly the Government will **‘support and encourage social responsibility, volunteering and philanthropy, and make it easier for people to come together to improve their communities and help one another’** (ibid) The set of now familiar measures proposed include the support of mutuals, co-operatives, charities and social enterprises; the training of new community organisers and creation of neighbourhood groups across the country; the introduction of the National Citizen Service and the establishment of a ‘Big Society Bank’ to finance **‘neighbourhood groups, charities, social enterprises and other non-governmental bodies’** (Coalition programme for government 2010:30) Other actions to **‘encourage volunteering and involvement in social action’** are also indicated (ibid)

Another key area of the document which focuses on devolution of power is to be found under the heading Communities and Local Government. This section refers to the Government’s intention to **‘promote decentralisation and democratic engagement’** by **‘giving new powers to local councils, communities, neighbourhoods and individuals’** (Coalition programme for government 2010:11). This involves inter alia a ‘radical’ reform of the planning system to allow local residents more of a decision-making role about the areas in which they live and also gives neighbourhoods an opportunity to save local amenities and services from closure as well as take over the running of local publicly-managed services themselves.

**3.15** With remarkable consistency the Big Society agenda has now been completely incorporated into the Coalition’s programme for government although explicit references to the Big Society have in this document been reduced to a mention in the Foreword and to special terms such as the Big Society Bank. Nevertheless the intention to encompass social action as a principle motif within their long term government strategy is clearly stated as an integral part of the Coalition’s ideological approach. There still remains ‘in the wings’ however the prospective challenge of the Comprehensive Spending Review and it may be noted that the final page of the Coalition’s programme for government contains the following ‘health warning’: **‘The deficit reduction programme takes precedence over any of the other measures in this agreement, and the speed of implementation of any measures that have a cost to the public finances will depend on decisions to be made in the Comprehensive Spending Review’** (Coalition programme for government 2010)

**3.16 (a) Speech by David Cameron on the Big Society delivered in Liverpool on 19 July 2010**

**(b) Speech by Greg Clarke Minister for Decentralisation on Growing the Big Society delivered on 27 July 2010**

David Cameron’s speech in Liverpool was delivered two months after he became Prime Minister. He spoke of building the Big Society as his ‘great passion’ (Cameron 2010c:3) claiming that he had been talking about this concept since he first ran for the leadership of the Conservative Party (ibid) First he explains what he believes the Big Society is all about and why it is such a ‘powerful idea’ He refers to it as a ‘huge culture change’ which involves values such as liberalism; empowerment; freedom and responsibility (ibid) : where **‘people in their everyday lives, in their homes, in their neighbourhoods, in their workplace......feel both free and powerful enough to help themselves and their own communities’** (Cameron 2010c:3-4) He refutes the long-held assumption that the way to improve society is to ‘micromanage from the centre’ and declares that many of the **‘most pressing problems have got worse, not better’** (Cameron 2010c:4) However he does not believe that simply rolling back the state is the answer. The government must instead help ‘to build up the Big Society’ which involves **‘a whole new approach to government and governing’** (ibid) The ‘three big strands’ of the Big Society agenda are, Cameron maintains, social action; public service reform; and community empowerment (Cameron 2010c:5) The methods by which these objectives are to be attained include decentralisation from central to local government and then **‘to communities, to neighbourhoods and individuals’**(ibid) There must also be a provision of full information to ensure transparency and allow people to for example challenge the police on their performance or where appropriate take action themselves (Cameron 2010c:5-6) Finally the creation of a Big Society Bank using funds from **’dormant bank and building society money allocated to England’** will help to provide finance social enterprises, charities, and voluntary groups in their endeavours to become involved in the provision of local services (Cameron 2010c:6) Cameron then focuses on the issue of decentralisation, a process that would allow ‘council leaders, social entrepreneurs and local activists’ to **‘take on more responsibility and have more control’** (ibid) After asking people what they wanted the Coalition had come to the conclusion that new powers were needed for **‘local communities to take over the running of parks, libraries and post offices’** as well as becoming more involved in the planning of local housing developments and having ‘beat’ meetings **‘to hold police to account’** (ibid)

Cameron then went on to announce the establishment of four ‘vanguard’ communities which had shown an interest in exercising ‘more power and control’ (Cameron 2010c:7) The communities were drawn from different rural, urban and suburban areas of England and projects would be led by ‘different sorts of people’ including local MPs, councillors and other community leaders (ibid) Projects would vary, for example in Liverpool leaders wished to build a volunteer programme to extend the opening hours of local museums, whereas in other areas there were plans to develop local transport services, deliver broadband to local communities or pilot open-source planning (ibid) Government would facilitate these projects by offering guidance and support from the Department of Communities and Local Government as well as funding and training community organisers for each of the four areas. Cameron acknowledged there might be problems and objections but viewed the experiment as a worthwhile learning process (Cameron 2010c:7-8) In his concluding comments he pointed out that he wanted **‘other forward-thinking, entrepreneurial, community-minded people and neighbourhoods in our country to come forward and ask for the same freedoms, the same support too’** (ibid) Any plan of action to improve the local community would be supported by the Government and it was hoped that the setting up of ,**innovation, local inspiration** **and civic action’** (Cameron 2010c:9)

**3.17** This speech accompanied the launch of Liverpool as a ‘vanguard ‘community which was one of four areas which had volunteered to take part in a number of ‘Big Society’ projects around the country, in effect trying out some of the ideas being promulgated by the Coalition as set out in previous documents and statements such as the Coalition’s programme for government. Cameron is here building on some of the ‘evangelical’ style of rhetoric adopted in for example his pre-election speech by using this occasion as a platform to inspire others with his own ‘passion’. However, although much of what he says has been heard before, he appears consistent in a sincere belief that the ‘Big Society’ is the best solution for Britain. Unfortunately Liverpool was unable to sustain a long-term involvement in the project ‘claiming the cuts to its budgets had so endangered the voluntary sector that it could no longer deliver it (Guardian 09/02/2011)

**3.18** David Cameron’s Liverpool speech was referred to later that same month by Greg Clark Minister for Decentralisation in a speech on Growing the Big Society. Clarks opening remarks encapsulate the Government’s approach: **‘our answer to collectivism isn’t just individualism. As human beings it is in our nature to join together to achieve common goals’** (Clark 2010:1) He continues by pointing out that the joining together can be achieved from the ‘top-down’ or from the ‘bottom-up’ **‘through diverse forms of self-organisation’** The latter in his view is **‘what defines conservatism –and for that matter, liberalism’** (ibid) Clark then recalls the ‘three strands’ mentioned by David Cameron as public sector reform; community empowerment; and philanthropic action. He explains the three strands as all being essential to the Big Society: **‘the first is about what the state can do for us. The second is about what we can do for ourselves. And the third is about what we can do for others’** (Clark 2010:1-2)In elaborating on these themes Clark refers to **‘communities of shared interest’** which include, as well as local councils, **‘voluntary organisations, faith communities, friendly societies, co-operatives and social enterprises’** (Clark 2010:2) The third strand of philanthropic action in particular involves charities, social enterprises, volunteers and ‘givers of all descriptions’ and represents the **‘purest expression of the Big Society’** (ibid)

Clark then outlines the three methods, also mentioned by David Cameron, which Government will adopt to build up the Big Society, referring to them as decentralisation (the redistribution of power) transparency (the redistribution of knowledge) and social finance (the redistribution of money and other assets). His present purpose as Minister for Decentralisation is to talk mainly about the redistribution of power, not just from central to local government but also from the public sector professions to the voluntary organisations (Clark 2010:2-3) He states that the Coalition Government is united in favour of ‘localism’ and therefore a Localism and Decentralisation Bill is to be introduced later in the year to begin the formal legislative process. Clark then goes on to describe the principles of the Coalition’s approach to decentralisation and the agenda to be followed in reaching this objective. After pointing out unsuccessful attempts by previous Government ministers to effect top-down changes by testing ‘pilot’ projects on selected communities and ‘rolling out’ the results nationwide he suggests that a better method is to allow communities to choose themselves as have for example the four ‘vanguard’ communities who are **‘eager to start putting the Big Society into practice’** (Clark 2010:4) The problem of replication can be solved by exploiting the ‘full benefits of the information age’ where **‘there is every opportunity for good ideas to spread quickly’** (Clark 2010:6) Similarly the adoption of innovative projects at local level means that any failures will have small-scale impact. Clark illustrates the advantages of the ‘bottom-up’ approach by use of humorous analogy and anecdote to make the point that the Government’s planned method of decentralising is to be recommended.

In the second part of the speech Clark moves on to some of the actions already being taken such as **‘by allowing parents to establish new “free schools”....or by allowing people to vote for a commissioner who will hold their local police force to account’** (Clark 2010:6-7) He also draws attention to the progress being made in removing restrictions on ‘local freedom’ such as the imposition of unnecessary targets, inspections, regulations and directives etc. Three key actions are still required however to complete the decentralisation process: implementation of people’s ‘Right to Know’, the ‘Right of Challenge’ and turning **‘central government upside-down and inside-out’** (Clark 2010:8-9) In relation to the ‘right to know’ and ‘right of challenge’ Clark maintains that judgements should be made **‘at the most local level possible’** since **‘this government views self-determination as a right and not a privilege’** (Clark 2010:8) On the question of ‘turning government upside-down’ Clark explains that he is setting up a ‘barrier-busting’ team within his own department whose ‘sole purpose’ is **‘to help community groups get the backing they need when they encounter bureaucratic obstacles to local objectives’** (Clark 2010:9) He concludes his speech by reinforcing the Government’s main message, that **‘the state should exist to serve civil society, not the other way round’** (ibid)

**3.19** Greg Clark’s speech is another version of the ‘Big Society’ message which has previously been almost exclusively the province of David Cameron and regarded as his own personal ‘mission’. Although clearly ‘on-message’ with the Prime Minister Clark manages to find his own individual style and concentrates on some of the more substantial aspects of the Big Society strategy. He is able to do this successfully partly because of his high profile role as Minister for Decentralisation but mainly as having the remit to take forward a legislative and practical programme for putting the plans into action. Using humorous analogy and a certain amount of self-deprecation he succeeds with the help of extended anecdotal examples in emphasising the more pragmatic aspects of the Big Society vision

**3.20 (a) Office for Civil Society (2010) Supporting a Stronger Civil Society: An Office for Civil Society consultation on improving support for frontline civil society organisations**

**(b)Cabinet Office (2010) Green Paper Modernising Commissioning: Increasing the role of charities, social enterprises, mutuals and cooperatives in public service delivery**

**(c) HM Government (2010) Green Paper on Giving**

The consultation paper ‘Supporting a Stronger Civil Society’ was published by the Office for Civil Society in the autumn of 2010 confirming that the Big Society agenda was still high on the list of the Coalition Government’s priorities. Its radical proposals for change centred round the three areas of ‘Promoting Social Action’ ‘Empowering local communities’ and ‘Opening up public sector contracts’ (OCS 2010:6) It was recognised however that **‘this opportunity emerges at a very challenging time’** (ibid) a reference to the difficult financial situation which was facing the Government and which would threaten to undermine the fulfilment of their longer term ‘vision for change’. Nevertheless the Coalition wished to advance with a comprehensive consultation procedure in order to learn what level of support was already being received by civil society organisations and what further help would be needed given funding constraints which required the targeting of resources to the most disadvantaged groups (OCS 2010:7) The paper outlined its main funding principles which included inter alia the following: **‘To address inequality, ensure all voices are heard and promote cohesion, there is a need to ensure support is accessible by diverse organisations’** (ibid) It was also pointed out that responses to the consultation would inform an Equalities Impact Assessment which the Government would publish along with the results of the consultation. The main body of the 21 page document is structured into three sections: Context; Principles of Reform; and Potential Priorities for Action. Detailed appendices provide a market analysis of current advice and support to frontline groups and tables showing sources of income for infrastructure organisations and an analysis of support use by beneficiary and levels of satisfaction by support user (OCS 2010:12-17)

**3.21** Under the heading Potential priorities for action the document outlines the level of support and advice that will **‘help organisations modernise and become more efficient’** (OCS 2010:8) Such measures would be intended for example to improve links between **’small organisations and skilled volunteers or mentors from business or larger charities’** (ibid) Apart from online advice and guidance civil society organisations are also prompted to forge closer links with both the public and private sectors so as to facilitate skills transfer and mentoring between organisations (OCS 2010:8-9) This type of social capital ‘linking’ behaviour is seen as **‘consistent with Big Society principles’** although the specific term is not used here (OCS 2010:9) Other specific proposals for support include the encouragement of ‘employer-supported volunteering‘ and the provision of bursaries to frontline groups to strengthen their organisational powers and enable them to play a more entrepreneurial role (ibid) The position of infrastructure organisations, which are seen as having the potential to establish effective communication links between the local public sector and civil society, is regarded in some areas as being ‘weak’ in ‘social capital’ and therefore such areas need to be specifically targeted for Government support (OCS 2010:10)

The section concerning the market analysis of current advice and support outlines the position of existing infrastructure services provided to local groups by general organisations such as Councils for Voluntary Service or by specialist organisations such as those providing support to Black and Minority Ethnic groups. The level and quality of support available to frontline groups is judged to be variable although it is recognised that those organisations working with disadvantaged and vulnerable groups are more successful in this regard. It is pointed out also that **‘many faith-based groups make a significant contribution to voluntary action for the common good....’** (OCS 2010:12) and further noted that those groups which do receive funding support **‘report greater success in grant applications and have stronger local partnerships’** (OCS 2010:13)

**3.22** As this paper is chiefly concerned with the support to be given to civil society organisations there is a strong emphasis on social capital building and in particular encouragement to form ‘bridging’ and ‘linking’ connections between different groups. While the language of social capital is not used (except in one instance) it is evidently the intention of the Government to provide funding and other practical support particularly in areas where social capital is seen to be ‘weak’ (see OCS 2010:10) The assessment of value for money gained from previous investment in local infrastructure organisations by the Labour Government acknowledges both benefits and weaknesses. Benefits, which included improved communication between frontline and the local public sector as well as closer collaboration between infrastructure organisations, were evidenced by the National Audit Office although these were not always found to be consistent or sustained (OCS 2010:13)

**3.23** In December 2010 a Green Paper on Modernising Commissioning was published with a foreword by Nick Hurd Minister for Civil Society which outlined the purpose of the consultation as pursuing the Government’s commitment 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’** (Cabinet Office 2010:3) Following on the earlier consultative document Building a Stronger Civil Society, it was hoped to make progress towards achieving the Governments objective of a **‘Power Shift’** from Central government to local communities (Cabinet Office 2010:5) This would be effected by introducing **‘improved commissioning practice’** which would **‘encourage a flourishing civil society, increasing community involvement in activities which were previously the almost exclusive domain of the state....’** (ibid) The consultation was therefore specifically aimed at those responsible for commissioning public services, including civil society organisations and was seeking their views on how the commissioning process could best be reformed so as to encourage the full and active involvement of the latter (Cabinet Office 2010:6) The Green Paper put forward four main questions for comment and response (a) In which public service areas could opportunities be created for civil society organisations to deliver? (b) In what way could existing public service markets be made more accessible to civil society organisations? (c) How could the full social, environmental and economic value be taken into account by service commissioners? (d) How could civil society organisations encourage greater citizen and community involvement at all stages of commissioning? (Cabinet Office 2010:7)

**3.24** The consultation document proceeds to address these issues by proposing a number of options for consideration. In order for example to provide new opportunities for civil society organisations to play a part in delivering public services where it does not already do so it suggests measures such as introducing payment by results; setting criteria for the proportion of services to be run by independent providers; and providing ‘new rights’ for communities to run services, own assets and for public service workers to form mutuals (Cabinet Office 2010:9) However although these initiatives are framed within the context of creating opportunities for civil society involvement they are also and perhaps primarily motivated by the 2010 Spending Review commitment to ‘increase competition and consumer choice’ by diversifying the provision of public services (Cabinet Office 2010:9-10) With regard to the ‘new rights’ these would be legislatively provided for in the forthcoming Localism Bill while rights for public service workers to form mutuals, employee-owned cooperatives and Joint Ventures for example would also be enacted in pursuance of the commitment contained in the Coalition’s Programme for Government published in May of that year (Cabinet Office 2010:10-11)

On the question of accessibility of markets to civil society organisations, the Government had set up a **‘Civil Society Red Tape Taskforce’** the specific purpose of which was to **‘reduce the bureaucratic burden on small organisations, particularly in the charitable, voluntary and social enterprise sectors’** (Cabinet Office 2010:14) Other barriers to access which would come under scrutiny were the TUPE regulations and the strict requirement under existing public sector contract arrangements to compete on cost rather than value which inhibited civil society organisations from making bids for public services (Cabinet Office 2010:15) Regarding citizen and community involvement, the Green Paper proposed that **‘citizens and communities should have opportunities to play a leading role at all stages of the commissioning process’** (Cabinet Office 2010:20) This meant citizens (and communities) would be empowered to decide priority needs and assess value for money in relation to local service provision. Greater access to information about local service providers and their performance would accompany these powers (Cabinet Office 2010:21) In addition a number of other initiatives would be introduced to strengthen working relationships and help create partnerships between civil society and statutory organisations including training to build citizen and community skills to facilitate their involvement (Cabinet Office 2010:22) A **‘Local Integrated Services’** concept which had been developed with the national civil society Turning Point was also being trialled in nine areas in an attempt to explore the feasibility of local joint partnerships working from the bottom-up to design and commission ‘service solutions’ through a **‘genuinely joined-up approach which pools local efforts and resources’** (Cabinet Office 2010:23)

**3.25** These two documents are highly significant in the Coalition’s programme to build the Big Society and signal the start of the consultative process which will eventually lead to a radical transformation of the way in which the public sector is structured and managed foreshadowing the White Paper on public service reform issued in July this year. The key principles outlined in previous policy papers and speeches remain intact but it is apparent that this has now developed into a full-scale plan of action. Nevertheless references to Spending Review commitments are becoming more frequent and there are indications in both consultation papers that budgetary constraints will have to be taken into account. This therefore throws into doubt the Government’s ability to fulfil its promises to provide adequate funding for the benefit of civil society organisations despite assertions to the contrary.

**3.26** Another Green Paper, issued at about the same time as Modernising Commissioning, dealt with the subject of Giving. Again this paper refers to the Big Society and its three main strands: Empowering Communities; Opening up Public Services; and Encouraging Social Action, focusing particularly on social action which is described here as **‘people giving what they have, be that their time, their money, or their assets, knowledge and skills, to support good causes and help make life better for all’** (HMG 2010:4) The main purpose of the consultation is to consider **‘how we can increase levels of giving and mutual support in our society and catalyse a culture shift that makes social action a social norm’** (ibid) The Green paper is intended to complement Public Service Reform and the Localism Bill both of which encourage social action as part of the Big Society agenda to ‘empower communities’ and allow charities and social enterprises to play a bigger role in delivering local services (ibid) Social action is seen as something that has to be ‘built from the bottom-up’ and be compatible with ‘people’s lifestyles and interests’ (HMG 2010:5) The benefits of reciprocity are highlighted as is the contribution that can be made by businesses as well as communities and individual citizens. However the main aim of the paper is to adopt a ‘collective approach to building culture change’ and provide some ‘ideas and examples’ to stimulate thinking on the issue. These include theories and views from outside of government and a number of essays are included in association with the document. The Green Paper emphasises the importance of giving time as well as money and describes various schemes for doing this. It advocates the increased use of volunteers in the public sector, commenting that **‘This is not about providing public services on the cheap.......by including volunteers in service delivery, we can increase the sense of ownership by the communities that access these services, and can improve community cohesion’** (HMG 2010:9) Similarly the proposed National Citizen Service would help to build ‘social cohesion’ by **‘creating new connections between young people’** (HMG 2010:10)

The provision of information about opportunities for giving is seen to be particularly important and the Green Paper lists examples of resources that are available such as do-it.org, the national volunteering database and the Government’s network of Community Foundations and Volunteer Centres (HMG 2010:11) The paper also mentions the ‘peer effect ‘ which encourages people to copy others’ behaviour seeing this as a possible way of spreading social action and cites the media championing of good causes as a positive influence on people’s attitudes towards philanthropic activity (HMG 2010:13) As well as suggesting there might be some value in setting social norms centrally, the advantages of exchange and reciprocity are extolled on the basis that giving time can improve various aspects of one’s life **‘socially, for instance, as a way of making new friends and building ties in your community...’** (HMG 2010:15) However what is more important is that people should **‘see and feel the benefits they can derive from contributing as well as the impact their contribution has on others’** (ibid) To help small volunteer–run and neighbourhood groups special funding would be made available through the Community First programme which was intended to focus on areas **‘with low social capital and significant deprivation’** (HMG 2010:17) while this scheme would be supplemented by the recruitment and training of Community Organisers who would be responsible for ‘galvanising’ people to become more active (ibid) A number of other Government funding initiatives to support organisations taking on volunteers were also announced in the Green Paper while further sources for obtaining additional finance would be explored outside government (HMG 2010:18)

**3.27** The Green Paper on Giving which concerns the Coalition’s plans to increase social action in society by affording greater opportunities for individuals and communities to donate money and time could be said to focus almost exclusively on the social capital outcomes associated with collective endeavour. For example the suggestion to promote social norms for philanthropic giving and the emphasis on the benefits of reciprocity are backed up by the intention to offer funding and other practical support especially in the more deprived areas of the country. Such initiatives could certainly be interpreted as a commitment by the Government to social capital building in an attempt to move away from individualism and bring communities together. The use of terms such as social and community cohesion which were current during the time of the Labour Government are also indicative of this intent.

**3.28 (a) Speech by Eric Pickles (01/03/2011)Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government delivered to the National Council for Voluntary Organisations Annual Conference 2011**

**(b) Speech on Big Society by David Cameron (23/05/2011) delivered at Milton Keynes**

**(c) Speech by Eric Pickles (16/06/2011) delivered at the Cinnamon Network meeting on Faith and Social Action**

Eric Pickles’ speech to the NCVO Annual Conference took place during a period when the concept of the Big Society was under attack. The previous month Liverpool one of the four Big Society ‘vanguard’ communities had withdrawn from the project as a result of the effects which local authority spending cuts were having on its budgets with severe repercussions for the voluntary sector in particular (Guardian 09/02/2011) In the same article doubts were expressed about whether the Big Society was now viable. This criticism was vigorously defended in a subsequent article by the Prime Minister in the Daily Telegraph which reasserted his commitment to the Big Society project and announced the forthcoming publication of a White Paper on public service reform which would put into effect the Government’s mission **‘to dismantle Big Government and build the Big Society in its place’** (Telegraph 20/02/2011)

It is no surprise therefore that Eric Pickles’ speech begins with a reference to the public spending review and the fact that the Coalition had ‘inherited’ a **‘record public deficit –with unsustainable spending’** (Pickles 2011a:1) He declares that the Government has tried as far as possible to **‘protect our funding to voluntary groups’** pointing out that ‘some’ local authorities have **‘chosen to recognise the immensely important role of the voluntary and community sector’** (ibid) He gives examples of these ‘best councils’ which know that **‘inflicting disproportionate cuts to the voluntary sector would be incredibly short-sighted’** (Pickles 2011a:2) pointing out that if some councils are able to achieve continued levels of funding support to voluntary organisations **‘there’s no reason why others cannot’** (ibid) Pickles expresses the Government’s ‘grave concern’ about those councils who have passed on ‘disproportionate’ cuts without first ensuring that they have eliminated waste and inefficiencies in their own administration and **‘clamped down on senior pay’** (ibid) He promises that those councils which have not met the Government’s ‘reasonable expectations’ in their bid to involve voluntary and community groups in the running of their services may be forced to do so through legislation (Pickles 2011a:3) He refers to the proposed introduction of new rights contained in the localism bill which will empower people for example to **‘challenge the way local services are run’** and provide communities with **‘the right to buy......and to run resources like leisure centres and libraries’** (ibid) Pickles also mentions new transparency rules which will force every council to reveal how much it is spending on the voluntary sector through grants and contractual payments (Pickles 2011a:3-4) In addition the bill will tackle the barriers faced by voluntary and community groups in becoming more involved by removing red tape such as ‘**the endless list of rules and requirements’** which prevent citizens from taking up opportunities to ‘do their bit’ (Pickles 2011a:4)In this way the **‘enthusiasm of volunteers, the goodwill of communities and successes of the voluntary sector’** will no longer be wasted –all are **‘an essential part of the Big Society** (ibid)

**3.29** David Cameron’s speech on 23 May 2011 about the Big Society attempted to address the question he knew was being asked by the public: **‘is this government about anything other than cuts?’** (Cameron 2011b:1) He answers this in the affirmative suggesting that although **‘we need to build a dynamic economy’** there was another ‘long-term’ challenge to be met: **‘We must build a bigger, stronger society’** (Cameron 2011b:2) Cameron refers to his aims for improving society as a desire to imprint a ‘lasting legacy’ for the present Government stating that the Big Society **‘is not some fluffy add-on to more gritty and more important subjects’** (Cameron 2011b:3) He points out that there are two key aspects to the Government’s approach to achieving the Big Society, firstly **‘the way in which we modernise our public services’** which he declares is not being done to save money but to improve services(ibid) By modernising and ‘opening up’ public services and **‘calling on our charities, social enterprises and private companies to get involved, we can build world-class public services...... that help build our Big Society’** (Cameron 2011b:4) However Cameron then focuses on the second aspect of building the Big Society which is to meet **‘the challenge of creating a culture of responsibility in our country’** (ibid) Responsibility, for him, is **‘the essential quality of the good society –of a strong society’.** He points out that people are eager to have the opportunity to ‘interact positively with one another’ and the Government needs to encourage this by for example ensuring that **‘reward is linked to effort’** (Cameron 2011b:5) He instances a number of situations whereby under existing arrangements people are rewarded for ‘doing the wrong thing’ while those who act responsibly are ‘taxed and punished’. For example on the Government’s plans for welfare reform Cameron claims that these will represent a **‘vital step in building a more responsible society in Britain’** and does not mean **‘cutting welfare for the sake of it’** (ibid)

**3.30** Cameron then moves on to explain the Government’s agenda for strengthening family life which again **‘is not a cuts agenda’** (Cameron 2011b:6) However he also focuses on the need for wider involvement and how the Government can promote this by encouraging people to **‘come together in their communities’** and by removing **‘the barriers that get in their way’** (ibid) A full programme of measures has been put in train to achieve these objectives including the Localism Bill and the Giving White Paper, the former of which deals with changes to the planning rules to allow local communities more decision making powers, while the latter introduces various incentives for people to donate more both in money and time (Cameron 2011b:7) Cameron also provides examples of further initiatives intended to prompt culture change and make **‘giving more of a social norm’**: introduction of the National Citizen Service for which over 10,000 16 year olds were currently being recruited; Every Business Commits - a campaign to promote payroll giving; and the creation of a Big Society Awards scheme to **‘recognise outstanding examples of innovation and commitment in social action, community leadership and public service reform’** (ibid)

In his closing comments Cameron turns to the more philosophical aspects of his vision for society deploring the fact that in the past Government policy has ignored the human and social aspects of life – an omission which he now intended to redress. Thus the Government were striving to bring the social dimension into ‘**the heart of the business of government’** in a way which he believed had not so far been ‘sufficiently appreciated’ (Cameron 2011b:8) In future the social impact of government policies would be taken into account when assessing costs and benefits while the creation of social value would form a key part of the essential criteria for policies in addition to their contribution towards the reduction in public spending (ibid) In addition the Office for National Statistics were **‘developing new independent measures of well-being’** so that the Government could monitor its progress on social indicators as well as those of the GDP (ibid) In pursuing this course Cameron avers that the **‘idea that the centre right is simply about the philosophy** **of individualism......is a travesty of our tradition’** On the contrary the philosophy is ‘planted’ in **‘tradition, community, family, faith, the space between the market and the state...’** In sum the Big Society is not just ‘some optional extra’ but a way towards making **‘our society fairer and more cohesive’** as well as creating **‘conditions for a more aspirational, entrepreneurial culture’** (Cameron 2011b:8-9)

**3.30** Eric Pickles introduces his speech on Faith and Social Action by talking about the preacher John Wesley who in the eighteenth century spoke about ‘**the plight of communities; of poverty and power, of equality and freedom’** (Pickles 2011b:1) He describes the tradition of all faiths as inspiring and motivating people to behave responsibly and morally saying **‘It is impossible to divorce faith from moral actions’** (ibid) and quoting Archbishop Sentamu as pointing out recently that **‘the Christian Church has been doing the Big Society for 2000 years’** (ibid) However all faiths were involved in working for their wider local communities and contributed by raising money for social causes and helping people suffering from a variety of personal, financial, emotional and health problems. The Government wished to encourage such activity even further by removing the barriers that prevented many groups from greater involvement. In this regard the Government would be considering the recommendations of the review by Lord Hodgson ‘Unshackling Good Neighbours’ outlining the bureaucratic difficulties being faced in attempts by communities to organise events such as fundraising for good causes and suggesting changes to ease the situation (Pickles 2011b:2) Pickles describes the support which the Government is already offering to help groups overcome **‘the unintended consequences of new laws or over-the-top bureaucracy’** because **‘the Big Society means less “officials telling you what to do”-and more “you telling officials how they can help”’** (Pickles 2011b:2-3) He is however mindful of the ‘tough financial times’ the country is living through, but stresses that every effort has been made to protect the most vulnerable from the worst effects of the spending cuts (Pickles 2011b:3)

In addition the Government continues to **‘recognise the invaluable work of faith organisations, strengthening the social fabric’** mentioning in particular an award of £5m to the Church Urban Fund for the ‘Near Neighbours Programme’ designed to **‘bring people together from different backgrounds.....through sport, art or community action...’**(ibid) Local Authorities also have an important role to play and some have already provided grants to faith groups or commissioned them to provide services. Other councils are less enthusiastic and therefore the Government is planning through the Localism Bill to empower local charities with a ‘right to buy’ and also the Right to Challenge which will allow groups, including faith groups, to take the initiative in putting proposals before councils for ‘proper consideration’ if they have ideas on how services could be better run (Pickles 2011b:4) In his concluding comments Pickles refers to the many faith communities now resident in the country stating that **‘the fact that we have different faiths makes us stronger’** also pointing out that **‘faith groups are the heart and soul of local communities’** (ibid) He therefore welcomes their contribution and hopes that future generations will recall this as the time when **‘the British became comfortable with social action inspired by faith’** (ibid)

**3.31** These three speeches are in the main defensive of Government policies in the face of mounting criticism about the spending cuts and the ever increasing threats to public services which are already having serious effects around the country. Eric Pickles’ two speeches to the voluntary and faith sectors represent an attempt to reassure them that the Big Society approach will not be jeopardised by the financial situation as local councils will be forced to act ‘reasonably’ while David Cameron, in upholding his commitment to the Big Society, emphasises the equal status of social well-being to economic growth in overall Government strategy. However Cameron’s main theme with regard to the former centres round the idea of ‘responsibility’ while the introduction of ‘carrot and stick’ approaches for example reward related to effort and the imposition of social norms detracts somewhat from the assurances made elsewhere about voluntarism.

**3.32 (a) Communities and Local Government (June 2011) A plain English guide to the Localism Bill - Update**

**(b) Open Public Services White Paper (July 2011)**

**‘The time has come to disperse power more widely in Britain today’** (CLG 2011:3) These words, taken from the Coalition Agreement of May 2010, are quoted in the Foreword of the plain English guide to the Localism Bill by Greg Clark Minister of State for Decentralisation. The Localism Bill, originally published in December 2010, is currently passing through Parliament and has now reached the Report stage in the House of Lords. The purpose of the legislation is to **‘achieve a substantial and lasting shift in power away from central government and towards local people’** (ibid) The proposals include: **‘new freedoms and flexibilities for local government; new rights and powers for communities and individuals; reform to** **make the planning system more democratic and more effective, and reform to ensure that decisions about housing are taken locally’** (ibid) The document is updated to include the outcome of the debate and amendment by the House of Commons as at May 2011. The guide covers all the main provisions of the Bill for example it addresses the general power of competence which allows local authorities freedom of action on any matter **‘provided they do not break other laws’** (CLG 2011:6) This means in effect that councils are no longer bound by previous legislation affecting their powers and responsibilities and will be freed where appropriate from **‘unnecessary restrictions and limitations...’** (ibid) On the new rights and powers for communities the Bill introduces the Community right to challenge and right to buy (see previous discussions) Communities will also be given wider powers to initiate local referendums the results of which have to be taken into account by local authorities and other relevant public bodies and in addition the right to **‘approve or veto excessive council tax rises’**(CLG 2011:10) The new Planning provisions will abolish regional strategies and introduce the right for neighbourhoods to draw up **‘neighbourhood development plans’ ;** grant planning permission to developers and to put development proposals forward for their local area(CLG 2011:11-12) The Bill is summarised as having significant potential for change in ‘national life’ **‘passing power to a local level, creating space for local authorities to lead and innovate, and giving people the opportunity to take control of decisions that matter to them’** (CLG 2011:19) In a Question and Answer Appendix to the guide the implications of the Bill for local services are addressed and it is pointed out that both coalition parties have long been committed to localism and that **‘the concept of the Big Society pre-dates the financial crisis’** (CLG 2011:22) The comment that central Government **‘has become too big, too interfering, too controlling and too bureaucratic’** emphasises the ideological nature of the Government’s proposals and their determination to see these through to fruition.

**3.33** The White Paper on Open Public Services was eventually published on 11 July 2011 having been expected to appear earlier this year, a delay which left the Government vulnerable to some criticism. The 55 page document is structured in eight major sections with a foreword presented by David Cameron and Nick Clegg. It begins **‘There is an overwhelming imperative- an urgent moral purpose- which drives our desire to reform public services. We want to make opportunity more equal’**(OPS White Paper 2011:4)This sentiment sets the tone for the foreword which focuses on the wholly positive impact on society which is expected to emerge from the proposals on public service reform. In the introductory chapter ‘Why Open Public Services?’ the justification for the approach is set out using the now familiar reasons for abandoning centralised government and describing the radical ‘vision’ which **‘places power in the hands of people and staff’** by inter alia decentralising public services to **‘the lowest appropriate level’** (OPS White Paper 2011:8) Public Services would also be opened up to a wide variety of providers including the voluntary, community or private sectors, it being categorically stated that **‘We do not have an ideological presumption that only one sector should run services...’** (OPS White Paper 2011:9) Later the point is repeated: **‘Our plans are not based on ideology’** however **‘we are driven by an ideal of people power- a belief that people know better than politicians’** (OPS White Paper 2011:11)

The following chapter on ‘Open Public Services in Practice’ sets out the five principles of Choice; Decentralisation; Diversity; Fairness and Accountability, addressing each of these in turn. Types of service are divided into individual, neighbourhood and commissioned with proposals to devolve power to the lowest practicable level. The benefits to communities include the power to set up (or utilise existing) neighbourhood councils to take control of local services such as street improvement and recreational amenities for example (OPS White Paper 2011:12-13) A section is devoted to the provision of individual services and the powers, rights of access, information and responsibilities to be allocated to citizens while a subsequent section on Neighbourhood services concentrates on such aspects as community ownership; neighbourhood control of services; and the provision of resources such as community budgets so as to enable local groups to carry out these activities (OCS White Paper 2011: 26-28) A section on ‘Ensuring diversity of provision’ picks up the theme whereby a range of providers will be encouraged to compete to deliver local public services. In order to ensure ‘a level playing field’ the Government proposes to **‘regularly assess barriers to entry and exit that may prevent diversity and innovation from being achieved.’** (OCS White Paper 2011:39) Such scrutiny would include the particular difficulties facing **‘smaller private, voluntary and charitable enterprises’** (ibid)

Apart from deregulating the public sector the Government proposes in the White Paper to provide public sector staff with the rights to form mutuals and compete to take over the services they deliver. Various options are suggested and examples given of initiatives which are currently in progress to forward this approach – for example the setting up of a Mutuals Task Force specifically **‘to push employee ownership across the public sector’** (OCS White Paper 2011:43) On breaking down the barriers to widening service provision, the White Paper takes into account the views of ‘providers, public service professionals and the public’ received following the publication of the Green Paper on Modernising Commissioning. Possible Government responses would therefore include a review of the employment regulations regarding TUPE and the modification of service contract procedures to allow for competition on the basis of quality as opposed to price (OCS White Paper 2011:44) The enabling role of central and local government in implementing the new arrangements is outlined in section 7 of the report and addresses such issues as **‘accessing new forms of external finance’** for example the introduction of the Big Society Bank and **‘accelerating the digitisation of public services’** by exploiting the full benefits of modern digital technology such as on-line health care (OCS White Paper 2011:52)

**3.34** In its final section the White Paper outlines the consultation stages to be followed involving wide-ranging discussions with interested parties over the period July–September 2011. It is intended that proposals for legislation will be forthcoming in November. The White Paper represents the overall response to earlier consultations and covers much of the same ground. Both the Localism Bill and the White Paper on Open Public Services are works –in- progress for the Coalition Government and it remains to be seen how much eventually survives the democratic process and what will be left ‘on the cutting-room floor’ In addition the Comprehensive Spending Review is likely to affect what can be achieved in practice both in the short and longer term and will have a decisive role to play as to whether the Big Society can ever be built at all.

**3.35 (a) David Cameron House of Commons Statement on public disorder delivered on 11 August 2011.**

**(b) Nick Clegg Speech on English riots delivered to Liberal Democrat party members on 13 August 2011.**

**(c) David Cameron Speech on the fight back after the riots delivered at Witney on 15 August 2011**

These three speeches were delivered immediately following several days of riots and looting which were apparently triggered by a police incident during which a Tottenham man was shot dead. An initially peaceful protest in Tottenham turned swiftly into widespread public disorder affecting not only many London boroughs but also reaching a number of midland and northern areas of England including Birmingham, Nottingham, Manchester and Liverpool. The English riots were characterised mainly by the prevalence of looting and arson of local businesses and private property, however several lives were lost resulting in charges of murder as well as acts involving disregard of the consequences to human life. Not unreasonably the public reacted with outrage to these events prompting the Government to take a tough line in the days that followed.

David Cameron’s speech to Parliament, which had been specifically recalled for the occasion, started by referring to the ‘important events in our country’- although it has to be pointed out that neither Scotland nor Wales had been involved in these disturbances - and inviting the House to join him in condemning the ‘completely unacceptable’ events **‘on the streets of London and in other cities across our country’** (Cameron 2011c:1) He then went on to describe the shock of the ‘whole country’ at the **‘most appalling scenes of people looting, violence, vandalising and thieving’** referring to this conduct as **‘criminality pure and simple’** (ibid) Cameron gives examples of the more serious incidents, most of which had already been relayed extensively by the media and would have been familiar to the public at large. After promising not to allow **‘a culture of fear to exist on our streets’** he undertakes on behalf of the Government to **‘do whatever it takes to restore law and order and to rebuild our communities’** (Cameron 2011c:2) After this robust start Cameron attempts to address the question of what went wrong. He denies that there is any **‘justifiable causal link’** between the shooting by the police of a Tottenham man and the subsequent civic disorder although he acknowledges that the circumstances of the former incident still remain to be investigated (ibid) He claims however that this event **‘was then used as an excuse by opportunist thugs in gangs’** to wreak havoc across London and in other cities. In his opinion the looting and burning **‘was not about politics or protest, it was about theft’** (ibid) He praises the bravery and dedication of the police while at the same time admitting that there had initially been insufficient numbers on the streets to deal with the incidence of lawbreaking on such an unprecedented scale and that the **‘tactics they were using weren’t working’** (ibid) In order to respond constructively to the situation Cameron proposes to act **‘decisively.....to restore order to our streets......to support the victims of this terrible violence..... and to look at the deeper problems that have led such a hard core of young people to decide to carry out such appalling criminality’**

**3.36** Cameron then outlines the various steps proposed firstly to restore law and order and bring **‘the criminals to justice’** (Cameron 2011c:3). These measures would be **‘robust and uncompromising’** He comments on the part played by the ‘social media’ in organising **‘these horrific actions’** and is working with the police, the intelligence services and industry in an attempt to prevent communication using this technology for the purpose of **‘plotting violence, disorder and criminality’**(ibid) In describing the range of actions to be introduced to further empower the police he points out that **‘ The fight back has well and truly begun’** (Cameron 2011c:4) Cameron then focuses on the victims referring in the process to some of the more vivid imagery presented by the national media, especially television and newspaper reports. He lists a number of compensatory measures to help rebuild businesses and repair other property damage in conjunction with insurance companies and similar agencies as well as the provision of special Government funding to help with specific problems including emergency accommodation for those made homeless as a result of the disturbances (ibid)

Finally Cameron turns to what he refers to as **‘the deeper problems’** He acknowledges that although the criminal is always responsible for the crime it **‘has a context’** which should not be avoided (Cameron 2011c:5) He attributes the underlying social problems to culture rather than poverty with **‘children growing up not knowing the difference between right and wrong’** (ibid) This is a culture, he maintains, which **‘glorifies violence, shows disrespect to authority, and says everything about rights but nothing about responsibilities’** (ibid) He puts forward a number of suggestions to **‘help mend our broken society’.** These include the provision of a benefit system which ‘rewards work’ and favours families; more discipline in schools; measures to tackle the most ‘disruptive’ families; and a criminal justice system that draws a clear distinction between right and wrong (ibid) Cameron expresses particular concern about ‘street gangs’ and the culture of violence and drug-related criminality which he claims were behind the coordination of attacks on police and the subsequent looting. He intends to introduce specific sanctions to tackle this aspect as well as other powers to strengthen landlords’ powers of eviction against ‘the perpetrators’ involved in this form of criminal conduct (ibid) He also mentions his request to various cabinet heads to produce a **‘cross-government programme of action to deal with this gang culture’** to be reported to Parliament in October (ibid) In concluding his statement Cameron draws on some of the positive features of the events that indicate a desire for the country to ‘pull together’ again referring to examples of resolve and determination shown by the **‘law abiding people who play by the rules’** in contrast to the **‘lawless minority, the criminals who’ve taken what they can get’** (Cameron 2011c:6). Finally he promises that **‘we will address our broken society and restore a sense of stronger sense of** (sic) **morality and responsibility- in every town, in every street and in every estate’** (ibid)

**3.37** Two days after David Cameron’s statement to Parliament Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg addressed Liberal Democrat party members on the same subject. He summarises the situation as a ‘traumatic’ week **‘for the nation; for the police forces around the country; and above all for the innocent victims who have lost their homes,** **their livelihoods and even, in the most tragic cases, their lives’** (Clegg2011:1) He then goes on to say that the country will not **‘be defined by the actions of lawless rioters, opportunistic thieves and the members of violent gangs’** and refers to the subsequent ‘clean-up’ operation as **‘the best of Britain clearing up after the worst’**(ibid) Clegg then quickly moves on to the longer term issues regarding the need to rebuild communities and people’s lives, referring to the underlying social problems which have been exposed including **‘gang culture; failing families; a welfare system that traps too many in dependency’** (ibid) He assures his audience that the Government is already taking action in all these areas of concern and mentions inter alia **‘tougher action on knife crime; a radical welfare reform agenda; national citizen’s service; more investment in parenting....’** (ibid) With regard to ‘the most problematic families’ he stresses the importance of timely intervention such as early years education specifically aimed at two year olds to help prevent **‘heartache, crime and cost years down the line’** (ibid) On the question of why the riots occurred Clegg wishesto understand, if not excuse, the motivations of those involved. There is a need, he points out, to gather evidence and then to respond **‘ruthlessly but thoughtfully’** (ibid) It is for this reason the Government are commissioning ‘independent’ research into the riots, in order to discover why, for example, some areas remained peaceful while others did not as well as trying to understand **‘what kind of people the rioters were and why they did it’** (ibid) He again refers to the Government’s concern about gang culture which they wish to ‘combat more effectively’.

Clegg is clear that the Government’s policy response will be **‘guided by our values of freedom, fairness and responsibility’** and **‘based soundly on evidence, not anecdote or prejudice’** (ibid) He himself had been struck mainly by the impression that the rioters **‘clearly felt they had nothing to lose’** and appeared willing to sacrifice their future prospects in life by incurring a criminal record. The potential consequences for themselves as well as their victims had seemed of **‘little value’** and they felt they had **‘little stake in society and no responsibility towards their own communities’** (ibid) While there was no excuse for such behaviour it was important to ensure people did have a stake in society by affording them **‘the opportunities to get ahead’.** The Government would therefore focus their social policies on social mobility such as giving extra funding to ‘disadvantaged’ schools; expanding apprenticeships and providing early years education although none of these were ‘quick fixes’ (ibid) In his concluding comments Clegg points out however that whilst Government and ‘broader society’ have a responsibility to ensure every individual is given ‘real opportunities’ it is up to the individual to take up the opportunities and **‘play by the rules’** (ibid) He broadens this argument to include **‘tax evaders and benefit cheats; bankers who break the bank but feather their own nests; MPs who rob from the public purse’** amongst those who break the rules but seem to prosper and warns against a **‘smash and grab culture’** where people are only deterred from taking what they want by the fear of being found out (Clegg 2011:3) He further maintains that **‘rule breaking spreads through society like a virus’** (ibid)On a final note Clegg hopes that this time politicians will really learn the lessons and take effective action to prevent similar occurrences in the future, referring to the **‘burning shame we feel at the disorder on our streets’** as an incentive to **‘thoughtful determination to understand it, and an unbending commitment to stop it from ever happening again’** (ibid)

**3.38** Less than a week after his statement to Parliament David Cameron spoke at a youth centre in his constituency on the fight back after the riots. He begins by recalling some of the key images of these events which had taken place over four or five days in early August, less than a fortnight earlier and still making media headlines. Having visited various locations affected by the riots he concludes that **‘people of every background, colour and religion have shared the same moral outrage and hurt for our country’** (Cameron 2011d: 1-2) He recognises however that there were different actions occurring in different parts of the country and therefore there was no single answer as to why this had happened **‘on our streets and in our country’** (Cameron 2011d: 2) There had for example been anger directed at the police in Tottenham, some organised crime in Salford but mostly **‘this was pure criminality’** (ibid) Cameron is nevertheless clear what these riots have not been about: **‘these riots were not about race.......these riots were not about government cuts....these riots were not about poverty’** The riots in his view are about behaviour; **‘people showing indifference to right and wrong.....people with a twisted moral code.....people with a complete absence of self-restraint’** (ibid) The discussion of what is right and wrong is for him something that has been avoided for too long and for a number of different reasons. This has produced the kind of ‘moral neutrality’ where **‘there are no bad choices, just different lifestyles’** and where **‘people aren’t the architects of their own problems, they are victims of circumstance’** (ibid)Cameron is of the opinion that **‘social problems that have been festering for decades have exploded in our face’** and that this therefore constitutes **‘a wake-up call for our country’** (Cameron 2011d: 3)

Cameron then continues by describing the **‘slow-motion moral collapse’** that he believes has taken place over the past few generations and undertakes that the government will make it a priority to **‘confront’** the situation and **‘turn it around’.** His own personal mission is to **‘mend our broken society’** (ibid) He wishes to build a **‘bigger, stronger society’** which will include reviewing existing policies in such areas as **‘schools, welfare, families, parenting, addiction, communities...’** The Government would also be required to re- examine other issues such as the ways in which the human rights and health and safety legislation has been allowed to undermine personal responsibility and people’s willingness to act **‘according to common sense’** (ibid) In placing the ‘broken society’ back at the top of his agenda Cameron then sets out the areas which he sees as a priority for action. On security he describes the measures for strengthening police presence on the streets as well as plans for elected police and crime commissioners to improve direct accountability to the public (Cameron 2011d: 4) He also proposes **‘a concerted, all-out war on gangs and gang culture’** stating that a cross-government programme has already been set up to examine all aspects of this problem (Cameron 2011d: 5)

**3.39** Cameron is not however just concerned about a security ‘fight-back’ he also intends to initiate a social ‘fight-back’ which will bring about **‘big changes right through our society’** (ibid) For example he expresses dismay at the apparent lack of parental interest in their children’s whereabouts during the riots and the fact that some parents had failed to turn up with their children in court. Family and parenting is therefore **‘where we’ve got to start’** (Cameron 2011d: 6) For him this means all domestic policies must pass a ‘family test’ to ensure they do not undermine, indeed that they positively encourage, family cohesion, values and commitment. On the question of ‘problem’ or ‘troubled’ families he promises to speed up measures already put in place with the aim of turning around the lives **‘of the 120,000** **most troubled families in the country’** (ibid) He also has plans for schools where improved discipline and higher standards of conduct and behaviour from pupils will be expected citing the good examples already set by schools in Tottenham and Hackney (ibid) He questions whether enough is being done to ensure that **‘great new schools’** are being set up in the poorest areas to help the children who need them most (Cameron 2011d: 7) Cameron then moves onto communities stating that **’we need a sense of responsibility at the heart of every community’** (ibid) He recounts some of the steps already being taken to generate a greater sense of belonging and a stake in the community for the people who live there including proposals to install executive mayors in the twelve biggest cities so as to create **‘strong civic leadership’;** the appointment of community organisers for less advantaged neighbourhoods; and changes to the planning rules to allow people more local control (ibid) Cameron wonders however whether these changes are now far-reaching enough to **‘spread the social responsibility we need right** **across our communities, especially in our cities?’** (ibid) The Government will be urgently addressing these issues over the coming weeks and a particular focus will be on the provisions of the Welfare Reform Bill currently passing through Parliament. Cameron states that in his view this legislation in its current form does not go far enough to counteract a welfare system **‘that encourages the worst in people – that incites laziness; that excuses bad behaviour; that erodes self–discipline; that discourages hard work....above all that drains responsibility away from people’** (ibid)

Cameron’s aim is to improve the sense of responsibility in society by helping people, and particularly young people into jobs through a Work Programme involving the co-operation of local authorities, charities and social and private enterprise. However he also wishes to revisit the Human Rights Act which he believes has contributed towards the undermining of personal responsibility and therefore is to be challenged through the Council of Europe while at the same time the Government are pursuing the possibility of a British Bill of Rights (Cameron 2011d: 8) In the same way existing health and safety legislation will be reviewed to remove unnecessary and illogical restrictions which prevent people from taking common-sense decisions (ibid) Cameron once again refers to the setting up of a National Citizen Service targeted at 16 year olds which encourages people from different backgrounds to work together on various projects for their community (ibid) The ‘old-fashioned’ values of **‘team-work, discipline, duty, decency’** are seen as **‘part of the solution to this very modern problem of alienated, angry young people’** (Cameron 2011d: 8-9) In his closing comments on the riots Cameron points out that **‘the social fight-back is not a job for government on its own........this is a problem that has deep roots in our society, and it’s a job for all our society to help fix it’** (Cameron 2011d: 9) He further points out that **‘greed, irresponsibility and entitlement’** have been seen at all levels of society citing the banking ‘crisis’, MPs expenses and the phone hacking scandal. Finally he concludes **‘we all belong to the same society...... there is no “them” and “us” – there is us’**

**3.40** David Cameron’s statement to Parliament immediately after the civic disturbances reflects the widespread reaction to these events felt by all sides of the House and indeed by most of the general public. Media reporting of the riots which involved an uncertain and inconsistent early response by police together with graphic scenes of violent attacks on shops and businesses as well as burning buildings means that the Prime Minister can draw on the country’s support for his tough stance on the restoration of law and order while his use of language such as ‘appalling’ and ‘horrific’ to describe the occurrences do not appear unduly out of place given the time and the venue. Having denounced the ‘criminality’ of the perpetrators Cameron dismisses racism, poverty or government cuts as being the contributory causes for the riots firmly blaming the lawless behaviour on the prevalence of gang culture and a general disintegration of proper values and sense of responsibility amongst the young in particular. He has, for the time being at least, abandoned the rhetoric of the ‘big society’ reverting to a discourse of the ‘broken society’.

Nick Clegg in his speech to party members also expresses shock and anger towards the rioters but tempers this with a conciliatory approach, in line with liberal democrat thinking, which strives to understand without condoning their behaviour. His attempts to reconcile the official strong Government line with a more nuanced perspective results at times in awkward language for example the aim to respond ‘ruthlessly but thoughtfully’ to evidence collected about the riots is well-intentioned but unhappily expressed. Nevertheless Clegg appears to make a serious attempt to appreciate the deeper reasons for the social unrest particularly in his comment that the rioters seemed to have ‘nothing to lose’ and should be offered a bigger ‘stake’ in society. He also tellingly refers to the equally blameworthy behaviour of politicians, bankers and tax evaders who have also participated in the ‘smash and grab’ culture which has afflicted the country.

David Cameron’s speech in his constituency was delivered after he had taken the opportunity to visit some of the locations affected by the riots and therefore was better informed about possible causes and implications which differed from area to area. By this time also many of the perpetrators had appeared in court and it was becoming clearer who exactly had been involved and the extent of their participation. Many of the rioters were being dealt with severely which was beginning to generate diverse comment at political level, amongst senior law enforcement personnel and in the press. Cameron continues the theme of the ‘broken society’ in an expansion of his previous week’s statement adopting an overtly ‘righteous’ standpoint on the ‘moral collapse’ of society which has occurred over the previous decades. He appears to hold individuals to account for their failure to take responsibility for their actions, blaming bad parenting, poor discipline in schools and inadequate socialisation of young people which has resulted in the ‘deep-rooted’ social problems. He allows no concession towards the distinction which C. Wright Mills would have made between a ‘personal trouble’ and a wider social issue (Mills 1959: 9) and although he attributes some of the problems to longstanding welfare dependency, thus implying some state responsibility, he focuses mainly on the ‘laziness’ ‘bad behaviour’ lack of self-discipline and a sense of responsibility which in his view rests mainly on the shoulders of the individual.

This breakdown in society justifies for Cameron a review of some of the social policy measures which are currently being taken by the Government notably the Welfare Reform Bill which he suggests may become somewhat more ‘draconian’. Similarly planned changes to the Human Rights Act and Health and Safety legislation will be instrumental in helping to restore the values of ‘discipline, duty and decency’ which Cameron believes are of paramount importance. Although Cameron stresses that we all belong to the same society and that there is no ‘them and us’ the impression that remains is the opposite. ‘Us’ are those who ‘play by the rules’ while ‘them’ are those who fail to do so.

END OF SECTION 3

**SECTION 4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

**4 Introduction**

The main purpose of this research review has been to examine the place of social capital theory in the former Labour Government’s thinking with particular reference to the latter’s ‘community cohesion’ strategies adopted following the civic disturbances which took place in the UK during the summer of 2001. There has also been an investigation into the ‘community strategies’ of the Coalition Government, which came to power in May 2010, to assess whether there is evidence that social capital theory has influenced their policies, notably those relating to the idea of the ‘Big Society’ the achievement of which has been central to their plans ever since. In carrying out the study the concept of social capital was initially reviewed in Section 1 firstly by identifying the main proponents of the theory as Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman and Robert Putnam, the last of whom is generally regarded as having been responsible for bringing the idea of social capital to wider public attention and attracting the notice of policy makers throughout the western democratic world. However the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman, while less influential outside the academic field, have by no means been neglected by politicians and there are strong indications that, even where not explicitly acknowledged, the present Government in particular, with their focus on family and schooling, may well wish to tread the path set by Coleman whose accredited findings on the contribution of (especially bonding) social capital to higher levels of educational attainment and reduced crime are worthy of serious consideration in a country where concerns about falling standards in schools and criminal adolescent behaviour are a current preoccupation of the Government (Coleman 1988;1994)

Similarly the ideas of Bourdieu about the use of social capital as a way of achieving and maintaining elite social status, thus preserving inequalities of power and resources within a hierarchical social structure, might have alerted the Labour Government to the need, for example, to ensure a fairer distribution of social capital throughout the UK. Social theory thinkers such as Wuthnow and Hall had identified patterns of social capital inequity in relation to both American and British society (Hall 2002; Wuthnow 2002) so it is reasonable to assume that New Labour’s attempts to eliminate racial inequality and discrimination in parallel with the move towards greater community cohesion were a strong indication that they recognised the importance of a ‘level playing field’ in this regard. Certainly there is substantial evidence that key members of the Labour Government had been made fully aware by academic and political advisers of the benefits and drawbacks of introducing social capital techniques as a policy ‘tool’ to bring about the range of social improvements which Putnam claimed could be achieved (see for example Harper 2001: Aldridge and Halpern 2002) There is little overt sign of Putnam’s influence on the Coalition Government’s thinking nevertheless the ‘Big Society’, especially in the earlier manifestations of its development appears to consist of a number of features which closely resemble Putnam’s conception of social capital, with the emphasis for example on ‘bottom-up’ collective action and a diminished role for the state (Putnam 2000: Putnam and Feldstein 2003)

These themes will be further explored later in this section together with the findings from an analysis of the policy reports and statements, consultation papers and speeches of both the Labour and Coalition Governments during the past ten years. A detailed examination of the Labour Government’s ‘community cohesion’ strategy was conducted on 25 documents and this was described in section 2 while in section 3 there was an account of the ‘Big Society’ concept which was analysed on the basis of 19 documents taking the narrative up to and including the recent civic disorder in August 2011. As is often the case in politics both Governments experienced major distractions in attempting to achieve their mainstream social objectives including, during the period in question, not only civic riots and terrorist attacks on home territory but also the effects of a worldwide recession all of which events seriously undermined their efforts to realise their respective visions of a better society. However in reviewing the findings from the documentary evidence which includes transcripts of key speeches, the main focus will be on the extent to which social capital principles have been deployed in their policies, strategies and official statements, whether explicitly or otherwise, while the impact of any external forces will be interpreted principally in relation to the policy changes reflected in the documents themselves rather than based on other sources of information such as media perception or public reaction.

**4.1 New Labour – the road to community cohesion**

The review begins four years into a Labour Government which, with Tony Blair as leader, had achieved an overwhelming electoral victory after 18 years of Conservative rule. The ‘race riots’ which occurred around the time of the 2001 election proved to be a challenge to New Labour’s ‘Third Way’ philosophy and to the Government’s resolve in tackling race issues in multicultural Britain (see for example McGhee 2003; 2005; 2008) This was the time when Robert Putnam was deploring the loss of social capital in America and shortly before the September 11 terrorist attacks which were to unite Americans in solidarity, albeit temporarily. After the publication of Putnam’s ‘Bowling Alone’ in 2000 the concept of social capital had been widely adopted by a number of western democracies and social capital literature was beginning to proliferate throughout academic circles and amongst policy makers who were attempting to assess the status of their own countries and evaluate the possible economic and social benefits of introducing social capital techniques either as the means of achieving such advantages or as ends in themselves. The Labour Government, after initiating extensive enquiries into the Burnley, Oldham and Bradford race riots were intent on achieving community cohesion and from the outset concluded that the main underlying cause of the disturbances was the failure of white, black and ethnic groups to mix. In other words the perceived ‘voluntary’ segregation of different communities had led to excessive ‘bonding’ ties at the expense of the cross-community connections or ‘bridging’ ties which had apparently been achieved in other areas with similar demographics. While recognising that some of the affected areas suffered high levels of economic and social disadvantage, as had been clearly highlighted in the independent and separate local reports on Burnley, Oldham and Bradford and to some extent by the Denham enquiry, the Government were nevertheless anxious to address what they saw chiefly as a cultural issue and chose to focus their attention primarily on the strategic objective of attaining community cohesion, an objective so important that a Community Cohesion Unit was established centrally to assist in working towards this aim.

**4.2** **‘Bonding’ versus ‘Bridging’**

The Government’s emphasis on the benefits of ‘bridging’ social capital rather than ‘bonding’ reflected the similar concerns of Robert Putnam who advocated the formation of horizontal ties as a way of restoring ‘lost’ social capital in America (Putnam 2000; Putnam& Feldstein 2003). However he did not dismiss bonding social capital as a valuable asset and thought it probable that a judicious combination of social capital types was to be preferred although he was not able to quantify this (Putnam 2000:22-24). Halpern refers to a ‘Vitamin model’ of measurement involving ‘bonding’, ‘bridging’ and ‘linking’ types of social capital and suggests that like physical health a community needs ‘a blend of different types of social capital’ to be healthy and effective (Halpern 2005:35). Coleman however was more sceptical about the advantages of ‘bridging’ connections claiming that the ‘closure’ and social control obtainable from the effective and close ‘bonding’ ties formed in families, schools and communities resulted in more beneficial outcomes particularly for young people whose educational attainments and general life chances could thereby be improved (Field 2003:26). Be that as it may there was general agreement at that time that measurement of social capital was unreliable and contradictory. Like a recipe social capital appeared to require a proper balance of the different ingredients and despite much investigation and research no-one had yet managed to discover how to effectively measure the different types of social capital or even agree on the ideal ‘mix’.

The Labour Government’s decision therefore that more ‘bridging’ was necessary in the aftermath of the 2001 ‘race riots’ was probably based on the view that the perceived problem of ‘parallel lives’ was the result of excessive ‘bonding’, but this conclusion did not necessarily take account of the more nuanced circumstances of these events or of the actual lived experiences of the people in the communities affected. However the Government were now fixed on their course towards ‘community cohesion’ and the method they adopted was to produce over the next few years a series of comprehensive policy documents which set out their expectations as to how this should be achieved. In the meantime the events of September 11 and concerns about terrorism had brought about further racial disharmony in the UK particularly in relation to the Muslim Community. While the Government expressed their continued support for migration and diversity (see article by Blunkett 2002) there was now a stronger discourse emerging which referred to the notion of ‘active citizenship’ and ‘integration’ in the context of the need for ‘basic order and security’ (ibid) By 2004 the consultation paper ‘Strength in Diversity’ was advocating as a key aim the move towards a ‘successful integrated society’ (Home Office 2004:1 – emphasis added). However this was to be accomplished by promoting equality of opportunity and good relations between different racial groups and by continuing the progress towards the complete elimination of racial discrimination. While the paper addressed some of the structural issues related to multiple disadvantage there was a sense in which this appeared to be a form of ‘social engineering’ to prepare the ground as it were for a fully integrated and possibly (though not explicitly stated) assimilated society. This impression was further reinforced by David Blunkett’s speech delivered at the launch of the document on which occasion he made the point that integration with diversity can strengthen rather than undermine a community’s social capital. Social capital as a concept featured prominently as ‘the glue which holds society together’ (Blunkett 2004:4) and he described it as being present in a community where there was ‘active citizenship’ and shared ‘rights and responsibilities’. Once again the importance of forming ‘bridging’ connections across communities was emphasised as this type of social capital was still being perceived by the Government as the most effective route to community cohesion.

**4.3 Top-down or bottom-up?**

As already suggested the Labour Government’s approach to achieving community cohesion was somewhat prescriptive and a number of detailed policies and comprehensive guides were produced in order to advise local government and other interested bodies how they should set about accomplishing this task within their own domains. The Community Cohesion Panel chaired by Ted Cantle issued a final report ‘The End of Parallel Lives’ in 2004 after two years of working with Ministers at national level and advising them on how community cohesion should be developed within their departments and at local level (CCP 2004:7) The report was fairly critical regarding the lack of progress in some areas towards building ‘community cohesion’ into the mainstream and linking with the racial equality agenda. In the Panel’s view it was particularly disappointing that so many Government Departments had failed to incorporate this integrated approach into their policies and programmes (CPP 2004:18) A welcome development however was the establishment of the new Faith Communities Unit in the Home Office and this was to prove a significant step forward in the Government’s strategy to attain a fully cohesive society.

The Faith Communities Unit presented their document ‘Working Together’ in 2004 while in the same year the Local Government Association issued a comprehensive guide on Community Cohesion for local authorities. In 2005 the Home Office published their strategy ‘Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society’ which followed previous consultations on community cohesion and race equality. Tellingly the strategy document reversed the title by leading with race equality, rather than community cohesion, which indicated a subtle change of priority. All these documents brought together an impressive range of policies and statements of intent, most of which had been preceded by extensive if not exhaustive consultations. However what particularly distinguished this series of documents was the sheer prescriptive detail of the advice and guidance provided as well as the directive nature of the programmes and plans to be followed. The Government were making it clear in what manner they wished local authorities and all other interested parties to proceed however they would find it more difficult to control or even foresee what would happen ‘on the ground’.

The issue of state intervention in attempting to create new or expand existing social capital has long been the subject of debate amongst social theorists particularly sociologists and political scientists. Putnam was frequently criticised for his relative neglect of the role played by the state, appearing to believe that the production of social capital was mainly the outcome of a spontaneous ‘bottom-up’ process. Indeed he was accused of a ‘path- dependency’ approach in that his earlier studies comparing social capital in northern and southern Italy suggested that the different levels of social capital found in the two regions were the natural outcome of centuries of historical processes (see section 1). In his subsequent American research he perceived the generational effect as being a key contributor towards the deterioration of social capital from the 1960s onwards (Putnam 1995; Putnam 2000). In the UK various historical, cultural and social developments have also influenced levels of social capital over the past 50 years although, if commentators like Hall are to be believed, social capital in Britain has been more resilient – partly because the state has taken a more interventionist approach, but also because of its longstanding support for the voluntary sector (Hall 2002)

**4.4 Faith in the community**

The Labour Government’s increasing reliance on the Faith community to help support community cohesion is evidenced by the setting up of a central Faith Communities Unit in the Home Office in 2004. This formal recognition of a relationship which had emerged from previous successful collaborations at the time of the Millennium celebrations and the Queen’s Golden Jubilee in 2002 was a significant step towards the Government’s objective of achieving a fully cohesive society - an acknowledgement of the experience and specialist knowledge as well as the key contribution already being made by the faith communities and inter-faith groups to the voluntary and community sectors. The ability to access ‘hard-to reach’ and excluded members of society was particularly valued as this resource was not always easily available to the mainstream statutory agencies, for example in situations where some of the more disadvantaged and marginalised citizens had fallen through the welfare ‘safety net’.

The Government were optimistic that a close and productive working relationship with the Faith communities would facilitate the spread of social capital to all corners of society. As was revealed in a later report in 2008 ‘Face to Face and Side by Side’ issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government over three quarters of the respondents to the 2001 census had identified themselves as having a faith which in many cases was active and it was this encouraging information which had prompted the Government’s hope if not expectation that the faith and inter-faith networks would provide an effective channel of communication through which social capital connections and particularly bridging and linking ties could be developed. The faith communities themselves were somewhat more cautious about their likely success in this endeavour (Furbey et al.2006) Research sponsored by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and carried out by representatives of the faith community into the activities and beliefs of a cross-section of religions and inter-faith groups stressed the ambivalent nature of their role although it was apparent from the wealth of practical examples and the views of research respondents that much positive work could be and indeed had been achieved in building bridges between different religious communities. However it was found also that some faith communities were more inclined and more able to co-operate than others and while a number of projects had been worthwhile there were several which had proved less beneficial (ibid). In one or two cases a successful venture leading to increased bridging and linking social capital in a community had grown out of the spontaneous initiative of a single individual or small group of persons who had decided to act collectively on issues of common interest (Furbey et al. 2006:39). These examples suggest that there may be limits to the responsibility for social capital formation which can be placed on the shoulders of the faith communities but it also raises the interesting question as to how far if at all the creation of social capital can be controlled from an external source and whether Putnam’s ‘grass roots’ spontaneous version is the answer after all. This aspect will be further considered later in the section in the discussion about the respective community strategies of both the Labour and the Coalition Governments and their approaches to social cohesion.

**4.5 Integration and Race Equality**

The terror attacks on London in the summer of 2005 gave rise to a political hardening of the Government’s attitudes not only in relation to the need for enhanced security measures and immigration controls but also regarding the increased pressure being brought to bear on certain sections of the community, and particularly the Muslims to tackle the ‘extremism’ in their midst and in effect police their own communities. Evidence of this can be found in Communities Secretary Ruth Kelly’s speech to the Muslim organisations in October 2006 as well as Tony Blair’s ‘duty to integrate’ address (Kelly 2006b; Blair 2006). The discourse about ‘active citizenship’ ‘rights and responsibilities’ and ‘shared British values’ was already well established in the public domain and the ‘integration with diversity’ message which had earlier been promulgated by David Blunkett was now ingrained in the Government’s vocabulary, however this language was toughened even further to imply that immigrants should make it their business to adopt the language and values of their host country and to fit in to the culture, suggesting the one-way process of assimilation rather than the mutual adaptation of integration. As time went by and under a different premiership this discourse was modified so that by the summer of 2007 the Commission on Integration and Cohesion in their final report ‘Our Shared Futures‘ were able to provide the reassurance that assimilation was not what was meant by integration (CIC 2007:9). In addition the report made it clear that cohesion was ‘not just about race and faith’ – in other words it was all-inclusive and embraced everyone (ibid)

This move away from the more controversial discourse of integration as meaning assimilation represented a widening of the debate about integration and cohesion into more mainstream terrain. It also allowed back into discussion the topic of social capital which had for a while rested on the ‘back burner’. The report ‘Face to Face and Side by Side- A Framework for Interfaith Dialogue and Social Action’ issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government neatly tied together the Government’s dual objectives of expanding dialogue between faith and inter-faith groups and using these connections to deliberately create ‘bridging’ and ‘linking’ social capital including forming ties with non-faith or secular members within communities.In line with previous Government initiatives of this type the paper specified a step-by-step approach to building social capital and in setting out its advice drew on previous research carried out on behalf of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion (CIC 2007) and for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation as well as the experience and knowledge gained from existing working relationships with for example the Faith Communities Consultative Council. Having provided the advice the Government then saw its role principally as that of enabler while supplying the necessary funding to resource the overall strategy and perhaps stepping in with practical support measures where appropriate. However despite the Government’s intention to distance itself from the operational aspects of the policy and leave local agencies to follow the guidelines prescribed there was reason to conclude that, even though a suitable framework had been provided for social capital to flourish, this did not necessarily turn out as expected. In the event the power of individual agency may have been overlooked and where freedom of choice was perceived as limited or the options available not attractive it was inevitable that some individuals or groups would make the decision not to participate.

**4.6 Unintended Consequences?**

In 2009 the Department for Communities and Local Government produced a discussion document on ‘Tackling Race Inequalities’ which aimed to review its progress and achievements in this area over the previous ten years but also to look at its priorities anew and ‘refocus its resources’ in the light of what appeared to be emerging as a major global recession (CLG 2009:4) There were still a number of race equality issues to be addressed which the Government wished to incorporate into one single Act together with existing equality legislation as a final move towards preparing the ground for full community cohesion. Apart from the economic difficulties facing the country political pressures were also building up with the inevitable prospect of a general election in 2010 and therefore a real concern about meeting some of their cherished deadlines before a possible defeat. This anxiety is reflected to some degree in the speeches of John Denham, Secretary for Communities and Local Government, in October 2009 and January 2010. His address at the launch of the Connecting Communities Programme, while acknowledging the effects of the economic recession, revealed disappointment at the failure of some communities to ‘connect’ in the way Government had hoped while his comments echoed many of the concerns that had been present when his 2002 report had been issued following the investigation into the Burnley, Oldham and Bradford ‘race riots’. In some respects nothing seemed to have changed although Denham valiantly attempted to defend the Government’s policy, deploring the fact that despite ‘unprecedented investment’ in many communities and a ‘forest of consultation’ both nationally and locally so little progress had been made towards achieving community empowerment and full participation in the planning and delivery of the services that affected people’s daily lives (Denham 2009:3-5) He also referred to the ‘the unintended consequences of good policy’ in the context of attempts by government to introduce race equality measures for black and minority ethnic groups, initiatives which had aroused the resentment of ‘white’ communities because of perceived preferential treatment of the former (Denham 2009:4) However this outcome could equally be said to apply to other aspects of the Labour Government’s community cohesion strategy and as will be seen the Coalition Government would not be immune from the repercussions of ‘unintended consequences’ when trying to introduce their own version of social action – the ‘Big Society’.

**4.7 Community Cohesion and social capital – success or failure?**

Before looking at the Coalition Government’s community strategies in detail, it is perhaps worth considering further the conclusion reached in sub-section 4.5 concerning the contribution of ‘unintended consequences’ as a factor which can undermine the successful achievement of social capital building in society by the state, or indeed by any national or political institution. Can this be the whole story? John Denham’s comment could from a more negative perspective almost be written as ‘the road to hell is paved with good intentions’ but such a standpoint would seriously underestimate the major achievements of the Labour Government in for example producing the comprehensive legislation which has resulted in substantial progress towards if not the full elimination of discrimination against all minority groups in society. Their efforts to consult with Faith and inter-faith organisations and their conscientious and consistent commitment to improving social capital in communities were impressive and bore significant fruit, even if much of it had not always been conspicuous. Towards the end of their political reign the Government believed they had set the scene for their community cohesion strategy to reach fulfilment and were disappointed when they were confronted with some significant failures. So what went wrong?

It would be simplistic to attribute any lack of success merely to the effects of ‘unintended consequences’ or even to unforeseen events such as a global recession. There were other possible ‘culprits’ at large which could well have affected the outcome of the ‘social capital’ project; firstly insufficient attention had been paid to the growing structural inequalities in society and the need to address the socio-economic positions of the most seriously disadvantaged and socially excluded groups and communities; secondly the Government’s interventionist approach to building community cohesion was, at least initially, biased towards a prescriptive ‘top-down’ strategy which failed to take full account of how the ‘community cohesion’ policy was likely to be interpreted and therefore delivered by those at ‘grass roots’ level, particularly those local institutions that were specifically charged with implementing the various initiatives within their own communities. Allowing that the Labour Government’s policies were as ‘good’ as Denham claimed and that some form of interventionist strategy was required, the question remains as to what they could have done differently.

**4.8 The ‘Big Society’ and social capital**

In the event the Labour Government did not have the opportunity to complete their community cohesion project before the 2010 General Election which the Conservatives narrowly won, subsequently forming a coalition Government with the Liberal Democrats under the premiership of Conservative David Cameron. In opposition Cameron had been a vocal supporter of the ‘Big Society’ which from the outset promised a strategy of a non-interventionist and diminished state. At the time he made his first major speech on the ‘Big Society’ in November 2009 he had moved on from an earlier theme which accused the Labour Government of presiding over a ‘broken Britain’ and was largely constructive in setting out his vision of a society which provided ‘the big society’ as an alternative to ‘big government’ However, unlike with the Labour Government’s ‘community cohesion’ strategy, it is difficult to establish whether the concept of social capital has ever played any part in the ‘Big Society’ policies or programmes. The term has only rarely been mentioned in any of the Coalition documents or speeches under study and seems not to form part of the Government’s normal lexicon. The phrase ‘social action’ frequently appears but there is no acknowledgement of Social Capitalist theory while explicit references to the work of Robert Putnam, so influential in the early part of the decade, have completely vanished off the radar. This may or may not represent a conscious decision on the Coalition’s part to eliminate all traces of Labour Government thinking on this issue as well as the desirability of a politically ‘clean sheet’. Nevertheless although social capital is not openly espoused in the Coalition’s community strategies, there are still indications that the concept may have in its various alternative guises found its way surreptitiously into ‘Big Society’ discourse. While the specific terminology of ‘Bonding’ and ‘Bridging’ social capital does not make an appearance it is clear that the Coalition’s call for ‘social action’ and ‘social solidarity’ is advocating the formation of the horizontal social ties which underlie Putnam’s similar appeal to the American nation to regenerate its social capital. In Cameron’s speech at the Hugo Young Foundation for example there were multiple references which bore witness to a social capital perspective including the need to build strong communities; the creation of trust; collective problem solving; and local political engagement (Cameron 2009) These objectives were all expressed in the context of a political environment which was envisaged as being unhampered by state control, regulation and bureaucracy – sentiments with which Putnam would probably have been in total accord as encouraging the more ‘bottom-up’ or ‘grass roots’ movement towards collective social action which he deemed to be the preferred source of social capital. However Cameron has never since expressed himself so unrestrainedly in language which it was claimed had in any case been ‘ransacked from Labour’s ideological and intellectual lexicon’ (Diamond 2011:5) The ‘Big Society’ has however, with the support of his coalition partners, continued to form a major part of his political and ideological agenda although it is still not clear how much this vision has been contaminated by the more pragmatic demands of the ‘comprehensive spending review’ which the Coalition found necessary to introduce very shortly after their accession to power. Once again the ‘law of unintended consequences’ was about to come into play.

**4.9** **Social Capital and the Coalition**

The Conservative Manifesto and David Cameron’s ‘campaign’ speech immediately prior to the General Election in May 2010 all contained extensive references to plans for the ‘Big Society’ the former devoting two substantial sections and over a quarter of the document to the topic under the headings Change Society and Change Politics. There were references to the need ‘to mend our broken society’- a reversion to Cameron’s previous remarks about ‘broken’ Britain which the Labour Government had allegedly presided over during its time in office. However there was a stronger focus on political rhetoric and less emphasis on the more idealistic and visionary aspects of a better society which had characterised his earlier address to the Hugo Young Foundation the previous November. Even implicit evidence of a predisposition towards social capital theory would have been hard to find at this stage despite the call for the nation to ‘pull together, work together, come together’ and the invitation to ‘the social enterprises, the charities and the churches and the other organisations’ to join in the ‘Big Society’ (Cameron 2010a).

Once the Coalition Government was in power the ‘Big Society’ discourse initiated by the Conservatives was immediately reinforced by the public support of the coalition partners and this consensus was ratified in the speeches of Cameron and Nick Clegg, the Deputy Prime Minister, at the Big Society Launch, together with the accompanying Coalition paper ‘Building the Big Society’ and the document ‘The Coalition: our programme for government’ which were issued within weeks of the election. The statement on ‘Building the Big Society’ reaffirmed plans to devolve power to the people and encourage them to take more responsibility to solve their collective problems. Society was described as primarily consisting of ‘families, networks, neighbourhoods and communities’ and these groups were to be allowed the opportunity of taking their own decisions about local affairs. This society- friendly language was strongly reminiscent of the descriptions of social capital building used by Putnam and was to be a cornerstone of much of the ‘Big Society’ discourse that threaded through an ensuing series of policy documents and speeches on the issue (see for example speech by Greg Clarke 27/07/2010) The Coalition’s ‘programme for government’ incorporated the whole of the ‘Big Society’ agenda into its plans which were aimed at the empowerment of people and local institutions by means of a radical reform involving the decentralisation of central and national government and devolution of decision making powers to the lowest viable operational unit. This aspect of the strategy was to be commonly referred to as ‘localism’ and represented the obverse of the policy which had been established under Labour.

**4.10 Social Capital and the Coalition’s Spending Review**

It may here be mentioned that the Coalition’s Comprehensive Spending Review was now to dominate other aspects of the Government’s agenda leading many social commentators to speculate on the sincerity of the Government’s Big Society commitment (see for example Taylor-Gooby and Stoker 2011). Was the need for spending cuts a genuine political dilemma facing the Coalition and forcing it to compromise on the promised Big Society funding or was the Big Society discourse merely a cloak to disguise the real aim to achieve a roll-back of the state – an ideological ambition which could be justified by the size of the public financial deficit? (ibid) The Coalition’s programme for government carried an unequivocal ‘health warning’ pointing out that ‘the deficit reduction programme takes precedence over any other measures in this agreement, and the speed of implementation of any measures that have a cost to the public finances will depend on decisions to be made in the Comprehensive Spending Review’ (Coalition Programme for government 2010). Yet although the Spending Review was to take priority it did not prevent the Coalition from moving quickly ahead with its plans to introduce Big Society initiatives, setting up a Ministry for Decentralisation under Greg Clarke during the summer of 2010. At this juncture David Cameron was speaking at venues around the country talking about the building of the Big Society as his ‘great passion’ and attempting to attract public interest in his proposal to introduce ‘a whole new approach to government and governing’ (Cameron 2010c:4). Despite the Government’s financial difficulties Cameron promised the creation of inter alia a ‘Big Society Bank’ to help finance social enterprises, charities and voluntary groups who wished to take responsibility for providing local services (Cameron 2010c:6). Experiments in civic action were also being set up in ‘vanguard’ communities which had volunteered to pioneer some of the Big Society ideas (Cameron 2010c:7). However the spending cuts were to sabotage some of these initiatives, for example early in 2011 Liverpool withdrew from the project on the grounds that it could no longer afford to participate. It would not take long therefore for the Big Society to start losing credibility at ‘grass roots’ level as it was evident that as the spending cuts began to take effect the public would withdraw whatever interest they might have felt initially and decline the opportunity to participate in the Coalition’s plans for their local democratic engagement. Their priorities would be elsewhere.

**4.11 The Coalition and a ‘stronger civil society’ – next phase**

During the autumn and winter months of 2010 a series of consultation documents issued by the Office for Civil Society, the Cabinet Office and the Government attempted to put ‘flesh on the bones’ of the ‘Big Society’ strategy. The first paper ‘Supporting a stronger Civil Society’ while recognising that this was a ‘very challenging time’ – a reference to the financial situation facing the country- nevertheless put forward its proposals for change with the focus on supporting civil society organisations on the part they were expected to play in the new reformed structure. The plan to empower local communities included funding assistance which would specifically ‘address inequality,’ ‘promote cohesion,’ and especially target those organisations perceived to be ‘weak’ in social capital. The document encouraged both ‘bridging’ and ‘linking’ behaviour by smaller civil society organisations for the purpose of accessing information, advice and skills from larger, more experienced bodies such as established charities, so as to help the former ‘modernise and become more efficient’ Here the Coalition were pursuing their strategy by advocating social capital formation as a means of reaching their desired objective of empowering smaller frontline civil society organisations to participate in local service provision.

The Green Paper on Modernising Commissioning was a consultation document which set out proposals for supporting the ‘creation and expansion of mutuals, cooperatives, charities and social enterprises’ again with the purpose that these organisations would become more involved in the running of public services. Both these papers aimed to progress the ‘power shift’ from central government to local communities, a process which would necessitate many communication links to be formed between the various organisations to be co-opted into this venture. The Coalition Government evidently hoped that by offering these opportunities the social capital initiatives required to bring about their fulfilment would spontaneously occur. They were either overly optimistic or supremely cynical in this belief!

The third strand of this concerted approach towards consolidation of the ‘Big Society’ strategy was to be found in the Green Paper on ‘Giving’ which focused almost exclusively on the benefits to society of philanthropic action, reciprocal behaviour and the application of social norms. The paper itself was couched in language which social capital theorists would find familiar such as the need to make ‘social action a social norm’ to ‘improve community cohesion’ and ‘build social cohesion’ by ‘creating new connections between young people’ (HMG 2010) Social action was seen as having to be built ‘from the bottom-up’ and once again special funding was offered through the Community First Programme, together with other financial assistance and the recruitment of community organisers in areas of particular deprivation. This is perhaps the most purely ‘altruistic’ document issued by the Coalition Government and the most clearly revealing in terms of their ‘social capital’ credentials.

**4.12 ‘Big Society’ meets ‘Comprehensive Spending Review’**

During the first half of 2011 the Big Society concept came under attack as the repercussions of the Coalition Government’s spending cuts began to make serious inroads into local authority budgets with the inevitable consequences for the voluntary sector, on which the Government mainly relied to carry out its strategy. Doubts about the viability of the Big Society approach appeared in the media and a major ‘vanguard’ community was forced to withdraw from the Big Society volunteer project as it could no longer afford to continue its participation. Nevertheless the strategy was vigorously defended not only by David Cameron himself (Telegraph 20/02/2011) but also in speeches by Eric Pickles, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, delivered to the National Council for Voluntary Organisations Annual Conference in March and later to the Cinnamon Network on Faith and Social Action in June. Eric Pickles’ address to the voluntary organisations blamed some of the local authorities for failing to protect the voluntary sector funding despite the Government’s admonitions to local authorities not to pass on disproportionate cuts and provided reassurance that their essential contribution to the Big Society would be safeguarded by legislation if necessary. Pickle’s speech to the faith organisations on ‘Faith and Social Action’, while similarly pledging financial protection in the face of local authority cuts as well as the removal of bureaucratic barriers to participation, focused more on the valuable contribution the organisations were already making and encouraged their increased co-operation and involvement for the future.

However the continuing allegations about the Big Society agenda and its incompatibility with the Governments programme of spending cuts were not easily dismissed. David Cameron again tried to answer the question ‘is this government about anything other than cuts?’ by explaining further what was intended and declaring firmly that the proposals for culture change did not constitute ‘a cuts agenda’( Cameron 2011b). Nevertheless by the time of the summer recess the deepening effects of the Coalition’s spending cuts and in particular the growing financial pressure on public services had seriously undermined the concept of the Big Society which now seemed to disappear from public discourse. In the meantime however the Localism Bill was progressing through Parliament while the delayed White Paper on Public Services was finally published on 11 July 2011. Both of these documents are designed to give effect to the radical and controversial public service reforms and devolution of power to local communities which have been promised by the Coalition Government since they came to power in May 2010. These reforms are inextricably linked to the success of the Big Society concept and will stand or fall depending on whether the latter can be rescued from its uncertain predicament.

**4.13 A Summer of Discontent**

The riots which originated in London and spread to other major cities throughout England during several days in August 2011 were the first real test of civil disorder faced by the Coalition Government during their relatively short time in office. Many senior members of the Government were out of the country when the trouble first started and then quickly escalated into unpredictable and sporadic violence involving looting, arson and damage to property and individuals. The inability of the police to control the situation initially together with the public outrage against the rioters prompted an immediate strong reaction from the Government concerning the restoration of law and order, expressions of sympathy and support for the victims and outright condemnation of the perpetrators. However it was soon necessary to address the social context of these events and attempt to explain the reasons for this widespread and seemingly spontaneous outbreak of criminal behaviour. David Cameron’s formal address to Parliament and his follow-up speech a week later in his constituency revealed his conviction that parts of Britain were indeed ‘broken’. He did not attribute the cause of these events to racism, poverty or government cuts, but placed the responsibility on cultural factors, particularly ‘gang’ culture and also on a general decline in proper values and sense of responsibility among the young in particular. In his view the ‘moral collapse’ of society had led to deep-rooted social problems as a result of bad parenting, poor discipline in schools and inadequate socialisation of young people. Much of this was due to laziness, lack of self-discipline and no sense of responsibility although the effects of longstanding welfare dependency may also have contributed to this state of affairs. Interestingly Nick Clegg who spoke to his Party members shortly after the riots took a more nuanced approach in his comments about the events. While condemning the criminal behaviour he attempted to gain an understanding of the rioters’ motives and was struck by their complete indifference to the consequences of their actions in believing they had nothing to lose and few prospects for the future.

The ‘broken’ Britain discourse has replaced that of the ‘Big Society’ at least for the time being. In social capital terms the bonding versus bridging dilemma may also have to be revisited. Excessive bonding may produce negative consequences as the example of ‘gang’ culture can readily demonstrate however from the perspective of James Coleman the reciprocal bonding ties which form between parents and children, within families and schools and close neighbourhood networks are important methods of social control which may help to deter young people from joining gangs where anti-social or even criminal behaviour may be seen as a group ‘norm’. It may be therefore that in the socialisation of young people attention will need to be focused more on the bonding aspects of social capital to provide them with the emotional security, confidence and self-esteem that will encourage them to develop into more responsible citizens.

**4.14 Summary and Conclusions**

The research review has clearly demonstrated the central place that social capital theory held in the thinking of the Labour Government and its plans to achieve community cohesion following the perceived breakdown in relationships in communities where different cultures appeared to co-exist in ‘parallel lives’. The influence of social capital theory is less evident in the case of the Coalition Government however it can be argued that there are strong indications that it has played a significant role in the development of the community strategies leading to the formation of the ‘Big Society’, a project which is still very much a ‘work in progress’. Both Governments, however well intentioned in their original aspirations to improve society in Britain, have been hampered by short term political exigencies and have, with varying levels of success, resorted to instrumental use of social capital rather than focusing on the concept as a good in itself although they must certainly be aware of the potential social benefits to be gained by thoughtful and sensitive deployment of social capital techniques as a way of attaining better education standards, reduced crime levels and improved economic activity for example. In the case of the Coalition Government in particular it has become clear that their community strategies are the means by which they intend to achieve ideological ends while they have overlooked important structural issues such as the ever-increasing socio-economic inequality as well as the social, economic and political implications of their spending review with the likely result that they will receive little or no co-operation from people ‘on the ground’ to achieve their ‘Big Society’ objective. The Labour Government in their quest for community cohesion also omitted to give sufficient attention to the more fundamental needs of deprived communities focusing on the perceived drawbacks of cultural segregation rather than the socio-economic deprivation and social exclusion of all disadvantaged groups irrespective of race or ethnic origin.

This is however not to say that state intervention has no role to play in the creation of social capital. As has already been mentioned Governments in the UK have traditionally supported the voluntary sector by supplying funding or inviting them to work in partnership with formal institutions, recognising the strength and greater effectiveness of the latter in certain areas of provision such as welfare. However the proposal to involve voluntary organisations as potential agents for service delivery in the Big Society project has been met with concern on the basis that working on a contractual basis would undermine their ethos and possibly affect the trust of service users who rely on their altruism and independence from commercial interests and the demands of a public sector agenda which may not address the needs of minority users (Panayiotou 2010:18-19) The former Labour Government’s strategy of negotiating with the faith and inter-faith organisations, whose voluntary activities manage to access the ‘hard-to-reach’ areas of extreme deprivation and hardship, has apparently been effective but again, by the very nature of this resource its social capital benefits rest in the hands of the service providers and are not under the control of any national or local institution. Nevertheless New Labour laid the groundwork and perhaps it is the best governments can do to help social capital to flourish.

Finally it is maybe appropriate for concerned policy makers to return briefly to the social capital theories expounded by their three main proponents Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam. If the Labour and Coalition Governments have not fully taken on board the dangers of trying to ‘pin down’ and control the direction of this elusive concept it is not too late to revisit and learn from the voluminous literature of ideas on the subject. Both Governments have had privileged access to the most respected and authoritative social capital scholars in the world while their own specialist advisory bodies such as the Performance Innovation Unit and the Office of National Statistics have produced detailed and comprehensive papers on the subject which also contain practical and specific proposals as to how the creation and development of social capital can benefit our society even though this may well be a longer term project than most Governments are able to contemplate. In the meantime there is the optimistic hope that the social capital ‘seed’ having been planted may well be flourishing below the political radar -not everywhere yet perhaps but sufficiently well in some communities to eventually lead to an epidemic!

**END OF RESEARCH REVIEW**

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