



PRESS RELEASE

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FIRST STUDY INTO ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE OF NORFOLK AND SUFFOLK VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS

THE FIRST in-depth study of the contribution made by voluntary organisations to the economies of Norfolk and Suffolk is to be carried out.

Big Society Funding Community Interest Company (CIC) will assess the economic value, roles and work of the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector.

The results will go into a public report called the *State of the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector (VCSE) in Norfolk and Suffolk*.

Big Society Funding, an independent social enterprise set up four years ago to help the VCSE sector thrive and survive in these challenging times, has been asked to carry out the three-month project for a partnership led by Norfolk County Council with Suffolk County Council and New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership.

Big Society Funding aims to engage with as many VCSE organisations as possible, including key decision-makers, charity and social enterprise leaders. The data will be fed back to NALEP and used to explore funding opportunities, support economic strategies and encourage more long-term investment in the sector.

Big Society Funding combines the energies, experience and expertise of three well-established VCSE consultancy businesses. Led by director Mark Ereira-Guyer, it has an impressive track record of helping a wide range of VCSE organisations across East Anglia to reach their full potential.

Mr. Ereira-Guyer said: "This is an important and exciting project which will give a detailed and comprehensive insight into the part social enterprises and voluntary and community groups play in 'Big Society' and the economy of Suffolk and Norfolk.

"Big Society Funding is pleased to have been chosen to bring our experience, contacts and wide-ranging experience of the sector in East Anglia to this project. We are in an excellent position to analyse its current state and look forward to encouraging local organisations to contribute to our findings."

The study will explore:

- How the sector has been affected by the recent recession and the opportunities arising from the economic recovery
- How many and what type of services the sector delivers for and on behalf of public authorities
- How far the sector feels engaged with the NALEP and how it can support its strategic objectives through economic growth
- The level and economic value of volunteering and the extent to which it is successful as a route into paid employment
- The skills and experience within the sector
- The extent to which the sector does or could benefit from the forthcoming European Structural and Investment Funds.

Chris Starkie, Managing Director of New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership said:

“Big Society Funding CIC's research will help us to better understand the sector, and how it has the potential to contribute to the aims and objectives of the LEP, and its partners, to deliver long-term growth across Norfolk and Suffolk. The intelligence will help to inform future programme development and to shape greater strategic and sustainable investment in the VCSE sector.”

The research has been funded by the East of England European Regional Development Fund Competitiveness and Employment Programme via 'Building Bridges'. Formed in 2011 and business-led, New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership is tasked with providing strategic leadership for supporting sustained economic growth across Norfolk and Suffolk.

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Big Society Funding CIC is a social enterprise, which helps individuals, charitable organisations, communities and voluntary groups to survive and thrive. It was created in 2011 in response to the Government's vision of a Big Society – where charities and community groups would be encouraged to take over the work traditionally done by the public sector. We realised that small voluntary organisations would need help to ride the wave of change about to hit them and set about providing this support where it was lacking.

Our mission is to equip (mainly) smaller VCSE organisations with entrepreneurial and sustainable business skills to initially survive and then thrive in their creative responses to the new policy agenda.

For more information and interviews please contact Mark Ereira-Guyer on 07913 818838 or email info@bigsocietyfunding.org

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