

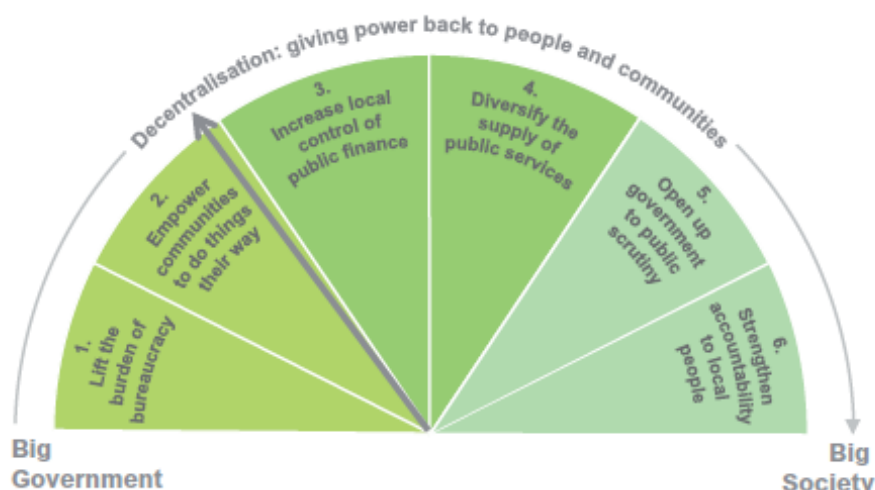
Decentralisation and the Localism Bill: a Government guide

The Government's guide to decentralisation and the Localism Bill is available at www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/decentralisationguide and makes the case for a shift of power from the state to local communities.

The Government say that the, 'best contribution that central government can make is to devolve power, money and knowledge to those best placed to find the best solutions to local needs: elected local representatives, frontline public service professionals, social enterprises, charities, co-ops, community groups, neighbourhoods and individuals.' They state that they are therefore committed to decentralisation as the biggest thing that government can do to build the Big Society¹.

Six government actions

The guide is intended to show how the Localism Bill will provide a legislative foundation for a decentralisation programme – by embodying and enabling six actions of decentralising reform. These actions are stated as being about actually making decentralisation happen by breaking it down into, 'practical steps that each part of government can – and must – take.' The Government argue these actions are required to deliver decentralisation down through every level of government to every citizen. They are illustrated in the diagram above.



The first two actions are described as, 'the most fundamental, because decentralisation can't get started without them.' They are to:

- **Lift the burden of bureaucracy** – by removing the cost and control of unnecessary red tape and regulation, whose effect is to restrict local action; and
- **Empower communities to do things their way** – by creating rights for people to get involved with, and direct the development of, their communities.

The next two actions are stated as, 'providing the resources and the freedom of choice needed to sustain progress on decentralisation.' They are to:

- **Increase local control of public finance** – so that more of the decisions over how public money is spent and raised can be taken within communities; and
- **Diversify the supply of public services** – by ending public sector monopolies, ensuring a level playing field for all suppliers, giving people more choice and a better standard of service.

The final two actions the guide says are about, 'enabling local people to take complete control of the process of decentralisation as it affects them in their communities.' They are to:

- **Open up government to public scrutiny** – by releasing government information into the public domain, so people can know how their money is spent, how it is used and to what effect; and
- **Strengthen accountability to local people** – by giving every citizen the power to change the services provided to them through participation, choice or the ballot box.

The guide sets out the case for decentralisation and describes each of the six essential actions in greater detail.

¹ The Big Society has been variously described by the Government but in this guide they say that, 'The Big Society is what happens whenever people work together for the common good. It is about achieving our collective goals in ways that are more diverse, more local and more personal.'