



An Action Plan for Community Empowerment: Building on success



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Foreword

Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

'There isn't a single service or development in Britain which hasn't been improved by actively involving local people'

This is an exciting time for everyone who wants to be part of creating flourishing, confident communities. The Prime Minister has called for 'a reinvention of the way we govern'. The Green Paper – *The Governance of Britain* – marks a new relationship between Government and citizens. This means making public involvement the rule, not the exception.

Far from being apathetic about social change, people will leap at the chance to get involved when given the right opportunity. I know this from people I meet as I travel around the country and I hear, everyday, of the growing enthusiasm and commitment of people in local government, other public bodies and in communities themselves to work together to get the best results for local people.

Bringing Government closer to people, passing power from Whitehall to the town hall and direct to local communities, isn't just the right thing to do. It's the best way to revitalise the local roots of our democracy and help build respect. It is the surest way of making local services reflect people's needs.

It is the only way we can get to grips with some of the biggest challenges we face – from climate change to childhood obesity – where people making little changes in their everyday life is a vital part of the solution.

All my life I've been a firm believer in local activism. My whole political approach, fashioned on the streets and estates of Salford, is anchored in localism and devolution. I've seen how genuine empowerment can bring positive change and build the resilience necessary to prevent problems such as anti-social behaviour, which left unchallenged will blight communities. I believe that the best experts, advocates and leaders for local communities are people within local communities themselves. It's they who know most about community problems, and they who are best able to provide common sense solutions.

The Governance of Britain sets out the broad framework of constitutional renewal. Much is happening already to pass more power to local people. *Strong and Prosperous Communities* – The Local Government White Paper has made clear that unprecedented freedom for local authorities must go hand in hand with strong links to local communities. In many places local government is already rising to the challenge.

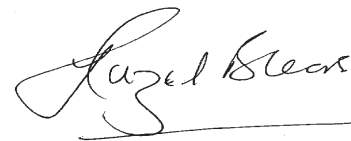
We are paving the way for the new statutory 'duty to involve' local people that comes into force in 2009. The success of 'community kitties' in places like Newcastle and Bradford has inspired us in government to help spread the lessons about the benefits of involving local people in budget decisions.

We should celebrate the success so far. Empowering communities has come a long way since 1997. But it's time to step up a gear; to go further and faster and to be more ambitious about what we achieve. The kind of change we envisage means change at a very local level; devolution right to the doorstep.

I see it as my job to make that change happen, working closely with colleagues across government, with people in communities, with local authorities, with the third sector and with a whole range of other partners. The work starts here. Realising the commitments set out in this action plan will, very quickly, have an effect that is felt throughout local government, in all kinds of public bodies and – most importantly of all – right in the heart of our communities and in the lives of local people.

This action plan is about achieving a step change now, in partnership with the LGA. It is about continuing on a journey together, building on the good work that is already happening locally. In summer 2008 I want to demonstrate how much progress we have made by reviewing this action plan and setting out a clear cross-government approach.

Local democracy in our country will be transformed and, with it, the lives and opportunities of millions of citizens.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Hazel Blears', with a horizontal line underneath.

Foreword

Sir Simon Milton, Chair of the Local Government Association

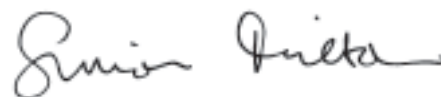
Community empowerment is local government's core business. Councils are elected to put local people first. The only way they can do that is by constantly seeking to enrich their mandate with a lively ongoing exchange with residents about how to improve local quality of life. Maintaining that conversation means continuously improving the opportunities available to citizens to get involved in debate.

Community empowerment and participative democracy are an essential complement to direct representative democracy, not an alternative. Democracy works best when it is a conversation; and one of the core elements of that conversation is building the community's input into the often controversial balancing act between competing community voices that it is elected members' job to make.

The LGA is pleased to support this action plan from the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. We believe local government has an enormous amount to offer in her mission to lead this agenda in government. The case studies in this paper show that local councils are at the heart of excellent community empowerment practice. They also give a sense of how widespread that practice is – with, for example, nearly a third of councils we have surveyed already exemplifying the kind of good practice on handling petitions that the Secretary of State has said she wants to generalise.

Other councils can learn from the best. And central government has, in our view, much to learn from councils; we are very supportive of the Secretary of State's wish to lead improvements in central government's empowerment practices. We would like to see a real discussion about how we can improve local accountability and leadership for a range of public services, including the police and the NHS.

Naturally, this document focuses on what the Secretary of State and her department have done and plan to do to develop the community empowerment agenda. While we acknowledge the role that central initiatives can have, we believe that the core task here is to build on the basic insight that empowering communities is right at the mainstream of what councils do. The task is less to invent new formulae for how to do it, than to help, encourage and challenge all councils to do what the best do. Our undertaking is to keep this agenda in its rightful place in the ongoing story of local government improvement.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Simon Milton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Executive Summary

This is a joint action plan for Communities and Local Government and the LGA to take forward a shared community empowerment agenda.

It forms an important strand of the Government's overall strategy for constitutional renewal, as set out in the *Governance of Britain* Green Paper. The cross-government strategy has a number of objectives. It aims to give citizens the means of participating in decision-making at every level; to clarify the role of Government, both at central and local level; to rebalance power between Parliament and government and give British people a stronger sense of what it means to be British. The work Communities and Local Government is taking forward to develop a culture of public participation and empower people to play an active role is a key component of this work.

We have significant experience to build on. In 2005 *Together We Can* brought together for the first time a wide range of programmes and initiatives from across Government. Many of these are continuing, and good progress was shown after the first year¹. Learning from The Active Learning for Active Citizenship programme is now available in the Take Part learning framework (see www.takepart.org.) and is, for instance, informing more targeted work with women who are under represented in decision-making structures. The Guide Neighbourhoods programme has confirmed how local residents can give inspiration and support to others as part of a menu of learning opportunities, ranging from 'seeing is believing' visits to long-term development support².

This Action Plan highlights areas where we intend to work closely with colleagues from across Government and where there will be more opportunities for

consultation and dialogue. We want this to be a building block for an agreed approach across Government on community empowerment, and we will review our progress in summer 2008. It demonstrates a commitment to being more ambitious, and will gather momentum over time, bringing in other government departments and their partners. We have also set up an online forum at CommunityEmpowerment@communities.gsi.gov.uk where we are seeking your views on deepening and broadening community empowerment activity.

The Action Plan sets out our work towards three key outcomes:

- Greater participation, collective action and engagement in democracy
- Changes in attitudes towards community empowerment
- Improved performance of public services and quality of life.

¹ *Together We Can Annual Review 2005/6*, HM Government June 2006.

² *Learning to Change Neighbourhoods: Lessons from the Guide Neighbourhoods Programme*, Communities and Local Government 2007.

It sets out activities in three key areas:

1. Widening and deepening empowerment opportunities locally

The more opportunities people have to make a difference, the better they feel about the services they have helped to shape – and the better they feel about the institutions providing them. We will work closely with local authorities to develop proposals set out in the local government white paper and enable them to create a menu of opportunities locally – to inform people about ways they could get involved, building on the good practice that already exists in many areas.

The environment will change significantly following the new duty to provide information, consult and involve local people contained in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill. This will help to empower citizens and local agencies to take this agenda to the next level.

Key Communities and Local Government programmes such as housing, planning and community cohesion will have community empowerment approaches embedded.

We want more people in more areas to be able to access opportunities such as: participatory budgeting; greater shared commissioning; petitions; and charters. We also want to encourage use of new forms of information and communication.

2. Supporting and enabling people to take up empowerment opportunities

For those who, at the moment, design and deliver local services, there will be a change in the way they work; moving away from ‘top down’ working, to ways of working that take the needs and wishes of communities into account and that try to meet those needs with services that are tailored to local circumstances. We will work closely with local authorities to develop proposals set out in the local government white paper and to enable them to create a menu of opportunities locally.

National level activity will help to evaluate, spread best practice and promote empowerment. This will include support for the National Empowerment Partnership, a network of empowering local authorities; and a national campaign.

Locally, we want to make it easier for the individual who wants to participate. To facilitate this there will be: simpler signposting for people who want to get more involved; better access to performance information; the transfer of assets such as land or buildings; and more support for community anchor organisations which meet diverse community needs.

3. Strengthening local representative democracy

We want to translate a willingness to participate informally or formally into enthusiasm for local decisions and bring new life to our local democracy. Critical to this will be a new ‘concordat’ to guide the relations between central and local government; the Councillors Commission; discussing with other government departments greater local accountability of public services and clearer local leadership.

These actions represent a challenge. Communities and Local Government and the LGA will take these forward as part of the broader improvement programme for local government.

We would welcome your views on the actions set out in this plan. We have set up an online forum at: <http://haveyoursay.communities.gov.uk/> forums and the feedback we receive will shape our ongoing cross-government programme.

Please contact us by 19 January 2008 with your comments and responses to the questions on page 49.

Summary of Actions

	Action	Detail
1	Secure more citizen-focused services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish statutory guidance to accompany the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill in draft for public consultation in winter 2007 with final guidance in Spring 2008.
2	Implement the new Sustainable Communities Act	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In autumn 2007 Communities and Local Government and LGA to consult on shaping the regulations and guidance for implementation of the new Sustainable Communities Act.
3	Give tenants a greater role in housing management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplify the process for establishing tenant management organisations and consider options for Arms Length Management Organisations.
4	Give citizens a greater role in planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build an e-consultation hub: 2007 link every local authority and 2008 open the hub to the general public. Publish national policy statements for infrastructure sectors that require scheme promoters to consult local communities before submitting an application. • Increase grant funding to Planning Aid to £1.5 million per year.
5	Embed community empowerment in cohesion activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish guidance on Citizens' Day soon. • Continue with actions arising from the Commission on Integration and Cohesion report.
6	Develop more community kitties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Announcement of more Participatory Budgeting Schemes in November 2007. • Early in 2008 consult on a strategy with the aim of it being offered everywhere by 2012. • Continue to work with the parish and town council sector.
7	Establish citizens' juries to help shape policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Winter 2007 – Public consultations on number of significant policy areas: housing growth, English language and migration.
8	Consult on petitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish a Communities and Local Government consultation document in Autumn 2007.
9	Develop more local charters: voluntary agreements between local authorities and communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish guidance and a toolkit in autumn 2007 and a trial programme to run to March 2008.

Summary of Actions *(continued)*

	Action	Detail
10	Continue to develop online tools to support empowerment and democracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will continue to develop www.peopleandparticipation.net with Ministry of Justice and the Sustainable Development Commission. • We will work across Government to encourage use of new forms of information and communication.
11	Support the National Empowerment Partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing – Develop more and better quality empowerment activities across the country.
12	Facilitate a national network of empowering authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Announcement and launch in October 2007. • Publicise examples of best practice and work with IDeA on learning programmes for local authorities from early 2008.
13	Develop a 'Take Part' campaign	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consult with partners on the development of a national campaign to demonstrate the opportunities people have to make a difference at the local level. • Produce a menu of the different opportunities and series of 'how to' guides for people to get involved formally in their local community.
14	Mainstream empowerment as an improvement priority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publication in the autumn of a National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy which will be implemented in March 2008. • Communities and Local Government, IDeA and LGA will continue to support councils.
15	Open up direct dialogue with local activists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autumn 2007 and throughout 2008 – organise a series of roundtable discussions and regional events between the Secretary of State and community activists.
16	Transfer more assets to communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Development Trusts Association is supporting partnerships in 20 areas to demonstrate what works in asset transfer and the creation of sustainable community enterprises which strengthen communities and create local jobs. • In winter 2007/08 there will be asset transfer workshops for local authorities and community organisations. Spring 2008 – publication of guidance on local authority asset management and risk management toolkit. • April 2008 – further demonstration areas to be supported.

Summary of Actions *(continued)*

	Action	Detail
17	Provide timely information about performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commission research into what practices are effective in helping citizens gain 'real-time' information about local services.
18	Invest in local community anchor organisations as resources to support local community activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over the next three years, we will invest, with the Office of the Third Sector, in the long-term sustainability of the third sector through supporting community anchors to develop their role in stimulating opportunities, attracting resources and supporting community sector organisations at a neighbourhood level.
19	Support Community Land Trusts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor pilots and publish evaluation.
20	Measure empowerment and make it visible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing – encourage empowerment through LAAs, and with the Audit Commission and through the CAA.
21	Establish a concordat between central and local government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> During autumn/winter 2007 develop a concordat to guide relations between central and local government.
22	Strengthen the role of local councillors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In December 2007 publish the Councillor's Commission Report.
23	Increase local accountability and have clearer local leadership of public services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In partnership with other government departments and the LGA we will consider how to improve local accountability and leadership for a range of public services, including the police and NHS.

1.1 What is empowerment?

Linda Hines knows very well the power of getting involved. As a resident in the Perry Common area of North Birmingham, she and others in the area were concerned about the deterioration in housing. Their homes were structurally unsound and faced demolition. Residents came together with the council to find a solution for Perry Common, initially in a Residents' Association.

In 1994 the Witton Lodge Community Association was formed with the help of the City Council, to manage the redevelopment of the Perry Common estate. This resident-led organisation ensured that the money raised from the sale of land for homes to buy was passed on to the Association to develop homes to rent. With these funds, plus additional borrowing, the Association could commission development and retain full control over design and build of the new community, which included improvements to roads, play areas and community facilities.

The area has been transformed over the last 13 years and the improvements are continuing due to the involvement and energy of residents such as Linda. Partnership working with the police has improved community safety, and better use of green spaces has contributed to making Perry Common an area that residents are proud to call home.



Community empowerment is essential for achieving excellent public services, strong and cohesive communities and a thriving democracy.

Yet many individuals and communities currently feel left out of the decisions that have a profound effect on their lives. So in the future we must do things differently. For public bodies, promoting community empowerment means a change in attitudes and approach – really listening, being prepared to be influenced, and giving real responsibility and support to local citizens. For citizens, it means being active – being prepared,

for example, to play a part in managing their own housing estate; talking to the police about neighbourhood policing priorities; or being a governor of a local school.

For Government it means helping to ensure that:

- public bodies recognise the value of empowerment both as a process, and in delivering more effective decisions;
- public bodies have the skills, support and local knowledge to include empowerment in their everyday work;
- local people are equipped with the tools and confidence to come together and find their own solutions to shared challenges;
- local communities have opportunities to take more control over the services that make a difference to their lives;
- a framework is created to enable service providers and local people to work together to improve the lives of everyone; and

- active citizenship is fostered through greater rights for people to participate, matched by well understood responsibilities towards their community.

Over the last few years, much of central and local government has become better at engaging with communities through better information, consultation processes and user feedback on services. This is important, but real empowerment needs to go beyond the process of engagement. It must make people feel differently about themselves and their power to influence. For example, local people may become less concerned about proposals for new housing when they have more information about house prices, land availability, and plans for schools and transport.

1.2 What have we learnt?

There is a wealth of experience in how to, and how not to do community empowerment and community engagement, but it is not accessible and as widely shared as it should be. Experience has shown the importance of empowering the whole community so that as many voices as possible are heard. But we do not want to move towards

Definitions

‘Community empowerment’ is the giving of confidence, skills, and power to communities to shape and influence what public bodies do for or with them.

‘Community engagement’ is the process whereby public bodies reach out to communities to create empowerment opportunities.

local communities where decisions are based on the loudest voices. We also do not want the majority to always determine outcomes – because some groups would almost certainly suffer discrimination and exclusion.

Communities and local third sector organisations may need practical help to run projects. We need to think about proper support for those charged with making decisions and in positions of responsibility. We must acknowledge that doing community empowerment badly can be worse than not doing it at all.



1.3 Why does empowerment matter?

There are a number of issues that affect people's attitude to participating in local decision making. These include understanding of local government, whether people have the time and resources to participate and whether people feel getting involved is going to make a difference.³

People want to know that government at all levels is listening, how decisions are made and how they can influence them. They are particularly interested in specific, often local and very practical issues and

feel strongly about the places where they live and work. The empowerment of people and communities, including minorities, to improve their quality of life is crucial to the achievement of better local services and outcomes.

Community empowerment is central to the choice agenda and the effective personal tailoring of services. It can contribute to a number of outcomes including:

- **improved quality of services, projects and programmes:** better and more responsive services, improved value for money;
- **greater community cohesion and social inclusion:** higher levels of social capital, better overall conditions in deprived neighbourhoods, and increased trust and confidence in institutions;
- **a thriving democracy:** increased democratic legitimacy for institutions, more opportunities for active

citizenship, improved reputations for public bodies, and greater accountability because of improved information; and

- **enhanced community capacity and learning:** better levels of public knowledge, individual skills, self-esteem and community capacity.

Empowerment is an important means of improving public services. Engagement in the design and delivery of services, citizens' juries, community ownership of assets and the ability to hold service providers to account all affect service quality. A service which reflects citizen's needs and involves citizens in its design or provision will be a better service. Where public service standards are good and improving, as is the case in many local authorities, empowerment gives incentives to promote both equity and innovation.

Approximately one quarter of people would like to be more involved in decisions the council makes that affect

³ Aspden, J. and Birch, D. (2005) *New Localism – Citizen Engagement, Neighbourhoods and Public Services: Evidence from Local Government*, London: ODPM.

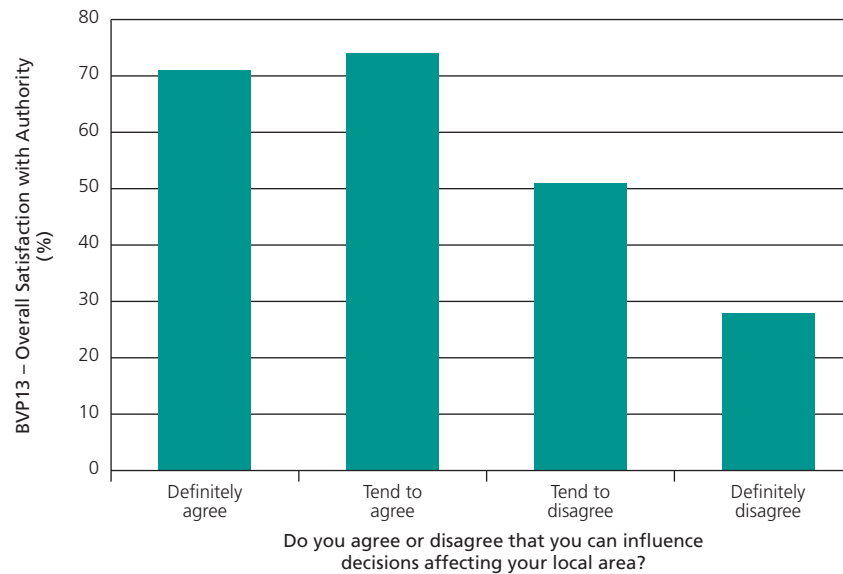
their local area.⁴ We also know that nearly one third of residents feel they can influence local decisions and in London the figure is slightly higher, at 40 per cent.

Empowerment is linked to trust. In 2005, 70 per cent of those who agreed that they could influence local decisions, also said they trusted the local council; compared to nearly half of people who said they did not think they could influence local decisions.

Overall satisfaction with the authority is linked to the degree to which respondents agree they can influence local decisions (see Figure 1).⁵

Empowerment of council tenants, when they have control of their housing through a Tenant Management Organisation (TMO), can also lead to significant improvements in both services and satisfaction levels. TMOs are performing better than their host local authorities (LAs), and equal or surpass the top 25 per cent of LAs in England in

Figure 1: Overall Satisfaction and Subjective Empowerment



terms of repairs, re-lets, rent collection and tenant satisfaction. 77 per cent of TMO tenants were satisfied with the

opportunities to be involved in the management of their homes, compared to 49 per cent of council tenants.⁶

⁴ Communities and Local Government (2007) *Best Value User Satisfaction Survey 2006-07: General Survey National Report*, London Communities and Local Government.

⁵ Communities and Local Government (2007) *Best Value User Satisfaction Survey 2006-07: General Survey National Report*, London Communities and Local Government.

⁶ ODPM (2002) *Housing Research Summary No.174 Tenants Managing: an Evaluation of Tenant Management Organisations in England* (ODPM: London).

Case Study 1: Community Involvement Directory, Portsmouth City Council

In order to raise awareness about community involvement opportunities in Portsmouth, the city council developed a Community Involvement Directory. The Directory provides information and contact details for the different opportunities available to the public to get engaged in their communities and local area. It includes information on neighbourhood forums, community boards, community partnerships, tenant participation, youth councils, patient liaison, Neighbourhood Management and voluntary activities. It also explains some of the different information and consultation exercises that people can sign up to, such as surveys and text messaging.

This initiative has made an important contribution towards the council's empowerment activities and there have been some impressive outcomes:

- 45% of Portsmouth residents feel that they can 'have a say' compared to 21% nationally;
- public satisfaction with opportunities for participation has risen from 48% (2001) to 56% (2005); and
- public satisfaction with services has risen from 77% (2004) to 83% (2005).

Source: LGA/IDEA (2006) *How Local Government Devolves, and Why: Part Two – Developing Local Strategies*.

In Portsmouth new information about opportunities for community involvement has more than doubled satisfaction rates amongst residents when compared to the national average – see Case Study 1.

Case Study 2: Hattersley Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder (NMP) – ‘Clean Sweep Team’

As part of its commitment to making local services more responsive to local needs, the Hattersley Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder undertook a consultation exercise with residents to identify local priorities. The exercise identified the cleanliness and appearance of the local environment as a key concern. In response, an Environment and Housing Theme Group was established, composed of residents and public agencies. This in turn established and monitors a ‘Clean Sweep Team’ responsible for tackling street litter and fly tipping.

Residents have reported improvements in the area between 2003 and 2006, including:

- an increase in those satisfied with the quality of street cleansing from 51 per cent to 74 per cent and
- a decrease in those who thought litter and rubbish a problem from 74 per cent to 60 per cent.

Source: Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder Programme. National Evaluation. Pathfinder Case Study. Impact on the Local Environment. Hattersley Neighbourhood Partnership; Tameside MBC. Prepared by Richard Meegan, European Institute for Urban Affairs, Liverpool John Moores University (August 2006)

Similarly, the neighbourhood management approach has led to significant local improvements in satisfaction with local services. Findings from the national evaluation of neighbourhood management pathfinders show that, between 2003 and 2006, the proportion of residents who felt that they could influence local decisions rose slightly, as had the proportion of residents satisfied with the area as a place to live. In the same period there was also a significant rise in satisfaction with the police and street cleaning⁷ – see Case Study 2.

⁷ *Research Report 28. Neighbourhood Management: An Overview of the 2003 and 2006 Round 1 Pathfinder Household Surveys* (Communities and Local Government 2006).

1.4 Our overall framework

The Government has put in place an overall framework for promoting empowerment, based on:

- Strengthening local leadership role and ensuring that citizens have the opportunity to have their say and get involved in local decisions;
- Promoting a series of specific measures across individual services and programmes.

We have a long history of community participation, engagement and empowerment practice. In 2004, the Home Office published the Government's framework for community capacity building, *Firm Foundations*. In 2005, *Together We Can*, brought together for the first time a wide range of programmes and initiatives from across Government which showed what can be achieved when the rhetoric of community empowerment becomes reality. Many of these are continuing, and good progress was shown after the first year⁸.

⁸ *Together We Can Annual Review 2005/6*, HM Government June 2006.

⁹ 2004 Home Office *Firm Foundations*.

¹⁰ *Learning to Change Neighbourhoods: Lessons from the Guide Neighbourhoods Programme*, Communities and Local Government 2007.

¹¹ *Resources for Empowerment, Summary of Initial Findings*, Involve, August 2006.

One priority identified in *Firm Foundations*⁹, and taken forward through *Together We Can*, was the importance of learning opportunities for citizens, communities, and public bodies. The *Active Learning for Active Citizenship* programme is available in the Take Part learning framework (see www.takepart.org.) and is, for example, informing more targeted work with women who are under represented in decision-making structures. The Guide Neighbourhoods programme has confirmed how local residents can give inspiration and support to others as part of a menu of learning opportunities, ranging from 'seeing is believing' visits to long-term development support¹⁰.

The Together We Can section of DirectGov (www.direct.gov.uk/togetherwecan) was created to support both active citizens and those who work with the community by highlighting the most useful resources for community empowerment across the field as rated by an independent review and users.¹¹

These and many other evaluated examples of community empowerment practice will be drawn together by the National Empowerment Partnership.



1.4.1 Strengthening local leadership

Strong and Prosperous Communities – The Local Government White Paper, published in autumn 2006 set out a range of proposals for empowering local communities in England. We want to ensure that citizens and communities have the opportunity to have their say, and get involved in, local decisions and services. The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill

introduces a new duty on local authorities (and others)¹² in England to inform, consult and/or involve citizens and communities in local authority services, policies and decisions. Local third sector groups may play an important role in helping to reach specific groups and may have an important advocacy role representing the most marginalised or vulnerable.

Over the next ten years the Government wants to put the third sector at the heart of work to build strong, active and connected communities, with local government acting as the most important driver in building this relationship. The final report of the review into the future role of the third sector in social and economic regeneration was published in July 2007. *The Third Sector Strategy for Communities and Local Government*¹³ discussion document set out proposals for strengthening local partnership working and supporting communities to have a

voice in setting local priorities. The Department will publish a final Third Sector Strategy by the end of the year.

From 2008, every area in the country will have a new Local Area Agreement (LAA). These are individual agreements signed by central government with local authorities and their partners. They set out the priorities in the local area and how the local authority and other public service providers such as health and the police will respond to them. *Strong and Prosperous Communities* committed government to LAAs being the **only** place in which targets will be agreed on outcomes delivered by local government alone or in partnership thereby ensuring that English local authorities and their partners have much greater discretion to respond to the needs and priorities expressed by the community.

Within the national indicator set there will be an indicator specifically on

empowerment, measuring whether people feel they can influence their area and another on rates of participation amongst different population groups, asking people whether they have in the past year been a councillor, school governor, magistrate or member of a decision making group on a local public issue. There is also a further indicator on satisfaction with their neighbourhood. These will be part of the 'place based survey' conducted in all local authorities, which will also include questions on cohesion and active citizenship. These indicators will also form part of the evidence reviewed in carrying out the Comprehensive Area Assessment.

¹² Only Best value authorities are required to meet the new duty: Local authorities; National Park Authorities; the Broads Authority; Fire & Rescue; Waste Disposal Authorities; Passenger Transport authorities; Transport for London; Greater London Authority; and the London Development Agency.

¹³ *Third Sector strategy for Communities and Local Government: a discussion paper*, Communities and Local Government 2007.

Box 1. Community Empowerment in Local Authorities

The Local Government Association (LGA) conducted in 2007 a rapid survey of member authorities' practice in the area of community empowerment which suggests that good practice is becoming widespread. On a sample of 102 councils – a quarter of the sector – the survey shows:

90% have neighbourhood forums/meetings which are open to the public;

90% use residents' focus groups

83% allow questions from the public at council/committee meetings

64% hold interactive budget consultations (open meetings, road shows, public debates etc)

30% have ward budgets for individual councillors

28% guarantee an automatic response to petitions

24% use citizens' juries

10% have a leaders/chief executives' blog to which the public can comment.

Many areas are already using innovative empowerment techniques to ensure that their citizens and communities are at the heart of developing and delivering their LAAs (see case study 3). We want to work with areas to help spread this learning and good practice more widely, so that elected representatives and officers everywhere have the skills they need for empowerment. And where key indicators on empowerment and citizen satisfaction suggest that these issues are priorities for improvement in an area, we would expect them to feature prominently in LAA negotiations.

Case Study 3: LAAs already prioritising empowerment

In Sandwell, 'Town Teams' are undertaking further work to consult and involve local communities in town forums, working directly with local town youth forums and integrating local representative groups to engage local networks and local citizens in the transformation of the borough. Progress has been made in

developing networks to empower communities, who have been identified as traditionally being excluded or marginalised from local decision making such as disability communities; ethnic minority communities; young people (Young People's Parliament) and older people (Agewell).

The *Governance of Britain* green paper,¹⁴ published in July this year, set out the Government's view that in addition to Parliament and local government some power must also rest with local communities. People who have demonstrated that they are willing are enabled to take on a more active local role and so help improve services and create stronger communities. The green paper committed Government to consulting on the following areas:

- extending the right of people to intervene with their elected representatives through community rights to call for action;
- duties to consult on major decisions through mechanisms such as citizens' juries;
- powers of redress to scrutinise and improve the delivery of local services; and
- powers to ballot on spending decisions.

¹⁴ Secretary of State for Justice and Lord Chancellor (2007) *The Governance of Britain* (green paper) London: HMSO.

1.4.2 Empowering children and young people

We are already taking steps to unleash the energy and enthusiasm of young people to shape their services. There is a new duty on local authorities to provide and promote positive activity opportunities for young people¹⁵. Empowerment is a strong theme of the 10 year strategy for young people published in July 2007.

In order to comply with the new duty children's trusts must ensure that the decisions local authorities make about positive activities are open to scrutiny and challenge. Overview and scrutiny committees may decide to review delivery. Ward councillors may challenge the provision of activities in their neighbourhoods in response to feedback from young people and residents. The lead member for children's services should ensure that young people's voices are heard through seeking their feedback on the effectiveness of services. Some local authorities have young people's

Case Study 4: Rochdale Junior Neighbourhood Wardens

In Rochdale, the Bowlee Park Housing Association and the Neighbourhood Wardens Scheme have set up a Junior Neighbourhood Wardens Scheme. The aim of the initiative is to provide local children with an opportunity to get involved and make a contribution to their community.

The Junior Wardens are given uniforms and books in which they record problems in the area such as vandalism, graffiti, repairs, dangerous or poorly maintained buildings and paths. These are reported to the Neighbourhood Wardens. The junior warden with the most reports in the month is rewarded with a family outing. The Junior Wardens also help

community groups with environmental projects, such as maintaining gardens in sheltered accommodation.

Becoming a Junior Warden is now a matter of some pride for young people. In order to become wardens they must have a clear record with schools and police for at least three months and this creates new motivation for those at risk of offending, truanting or exclusion. Most importantly, this scheme provides 170 children with an opportunity to contribute to their community and make a difference to their local area.

Source: Gafney, M (2005) *Civic Pioneers: Local People, Local Government, Working Together to Make Life Better*, London: Home Office.

¹⁵ Section 507B of the Education Act 1996 – introduced through section 6 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 ensures that a single body working within the context of the children's trust holds lead responsibility for securing young people's access to positive activities. The Education and Inspections Act came into force in January 2007 with guidance issued in Autumn 2007.

champions – for example, a Local Children's Commissioner, Young Advocate or Young Mayor.

The response to the youth green paper *Youth Matters: Next Steps*, in March 2006, introduced the Youth Opportunity and Capital Funds. Between 2006 and 2009 these are giving young people (via their local authorities) the power to determine the spending of £115 million on youth services and facilities in their local communities. Building on the success of the scheme, £200 million will be made available to continue to empower young people through this scheme (particularly in the most disadvantaged communities) over the next three years.

Case Study 5: Young people supporting their communities

"Being a Young Advisor has not only taken me to London for the first time ever, but given me the confidence to address local, regional and national meetings on matters affecting my generation. I help local authorities, housing associations and other partners to 'youth proof' their strategies. So now we have a voice at all levels of government." (Emma Richardson, YA)

Young Advisors are young people's 'champions' aged 15-21 years. They speak out for young people, telling a wide range of decision makers what young people believe their communities need, compared to what local planners think is feasible. They advise adults, community leaders and agencies how to better engage young people in community life and regeneration, having been trained to 'youth proof' policies and practices. They also work directly with young people to encourage them to get involved in regeneration.

The Young Advisors scheme was designed and initiated by Communities and Local Government and was set up within existing New Deal for Communities (NDC) regeneration projects in Hull, Middlesbrough, Manchester and Brighton. The model has proved to be very successful with 20 schemes now in operation with a further 16 in the pipeline. They have:

- Designed a training package for LSPs, on the necessity of involving young people (through Young Advisors) in Local Area Agreements.
- Conducted a community health survey for a PCT in the Wirral.
- Youth Proofed Connexions Strategy. "Youth Proofing the strategy meant that young people were able to understand what was being done for them and question it."

1.4.3 Promoting empowerment in particular programmes

Respect: The *Respect Action Plan*, published in January 2006 set out to create a modern culture of respect in communities. This involved a cross government programme including, for example, greater empowerment of young people for example alongside more tools and powers for local councils, police and landlords to prevent and tackle anti-social behaviour head on. Empowerment is at the heart of the Respect programme.

Neighbourhood renewal: Since the publication of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal in 2000 the Government has made positive progress in closing the gap between the most deprived authorities and the national average on key floor targets, although performance at the neighbourhood level has been more mixed. The New Deal for Communities was established as a major programme for extending power to local communities in deprived areas. Residents were placed “at the heart of NDCs’

decision making”. All NDCs have residents on the board – see Case Study 6. There is growing evidence that this has altered local peoples’ perceptions of regeneration and their willingness to engage with it. In 2006, nearly a quarter of local residents across 39 NDC areas had been involved in NDC activities, an increase over the last four years. During the same time period, there was a 7 percentage point increase in the number of NDC residents who feel part of the community, and a small increase in those who felt able to influence local decisions.¹⁶

Neighbourhood management: This has been a valuable mechanism for involving local residents in influencing local services. In addition, community empowerment networks, supported through the Neighbourhood Renewal Programme, have tested out a range of different structures for engaging people from across the whole spectrum of the voluntary and community sector in influencing community strategies, the

Local Strategic Partnership, and thematic policy areas such as crime and community safety.



¹⁶ *National Evaluation of New Deal for Communities Household Survey*. 2006 Ipsos-MORI.

Case Study 6: Shoreditch Trust – NDC in Hackney Peer Education – Community Development Programme

Shoreditch Trust has pioneered peer education and health guides. The Trust set up the Peer Education Scheme in 2002 and over 120 local people have so far completed the course. It provides students with the skills necessary to become a community interpreter, advocate and peer educator in the community, with an opportunity to develop their own community project and improve fundraising skills. Peer educators move on to paid or voluntary advocacy positions applying the skills they acquired while on the course to a variety of full time or part time employment, frequently in the frontline of regeneration, health, education or related sectors.

“Attending the course helped me to improve my skills and experience in working with the community, and deal with the issues which affect people. It was also very enjoyable and a chance to meet people from a wide range of backgrounds who live in the area. Since being on the course, I have been able to do many things: I have worked as a community researcher in health and social care fields and also for the Shoreditch Trust’s housing team. I have helped with youth football coaching and volunteered with the Shoreditch Spa and the Shoreditch Festival. The course has provided me with the personal development skills and knowledge to get involved in a range of fields. I am a Shoreditch Trust board member” [David Moro.]

Neighbourhood Policing: Work is underway to integrate neighbourhood policing with neighbourhood management. In his recent interim report, Sir Ronnie Flanagan said that the following factors are critical in delivering successful neighbourhood policing:¹⁷

- Visible, accessible and locally known figures;
- community involvement in identifying priorities, followed by targeted police action and problem solving to tackle them; and
- strong relationships and joint working with local partners to address community safety and quality of life issues.

The Commission on Integration and Cohesion: The independent Commission on Integration and Cohesion’s report, *Our Shared Future*, was published on 14 June and put forward a wide-ranging set of recommendations. It emphasised the importance of community engagement to building cohesion. The

¹⁷ Flanagan, R, (2007) *The Review of Policing: Interim Report*, London: Home Office.

Government has welcomed the direction of the report and on 5 October announced a £50m investment in cohesion along with a first set of actions arising from the report, including the publication of guidance on Citizens' Day. There will be further announcements in the New Year.



1.5 What needs to change?

Taken together, the framework set out above represents a significant shift to enable a new relationship between citizens, communities and government. This was reinforced by the Comprehensive Spending Review for 2008-11. Central Government is delivering on our intention to devolve more power. From April 2008 there will be more local financial flexibility. The number of local indicators will decrease from 1200 to just under 200.

Strong and Prosperous Communities – local government white paper acknowledged that the time had come for devolution to local government. At the same time the white paper made clear that unprecedented freedom for local authorities needed to go hand in hand with strong links to local communities. Councils and communities now have more power to take action on the issues local people care about whether it's tackling guns and gangs, providing more affordable housing or improving the local neighbourhood.

We now need more of local government to participate in achieving a significant shift in power towards local communities. For those who, at the moment, design and deliver local services, this means a change in the way they work. Moving away from 'top down' working, to an approach that treats the needs and wishes of communities as central to their business and that tries always to meet those needs with services that are tailored to local circumstances.

It means local agencies, such as neighbourhood policing teams, mobilising the positive will of the many to counter the anti-social destructive actions of the minority. Local people of all ages, coming together to participate in and shape local services to ensure they address the things people care about in their community; crime and anti-social behaviour, safe and clean streets and high quality and welcoming public spaces, schools, leisure and health services.

It may mean changing the way money is spent and – to some extent – what it is spent on. We must ensure that this does not become a demand for ever more money, but accept that involving the representatives of service users in choosing the priorities will change the decisions that are made. More and more, local authorities are not delivering services themselves, but commissioning others to do so. For example, instead of running the local sports centre themselves, they contract with a locally-run company to do it, or establish a mutual or trust. Because authorities are less wrapped up in day-to-day business, while still reviewing performance to ensure that services are up to standard, they have greater opportunities to talk to the community and put in place the services that local people need.

There are therefore significant opportunities to rethink how we approach service delivery and to use involvement in the design and delivery of services as a tool to develop and promote cohesion, community empowerment, and active citizenship. It should result in

greater personalisation and better choices for users and communities.

As set out in the *Varney* report the next stage of public service reform must involve engaging citizens and businesses more fully in the design and delivery of public services, it must transform contact with citizens and businesses.¹⁸

We also recognise that rights and responsibility go hand in hand. Respect is a two way street. Those that want to contribute positively should be supported. Those that do not respect local services or others in their community should be challenged. Empowerment needs people to feel safe to speak up and have their say. People will not feel empowered if they are afraid to leave their house.

The challenge now is to accelerate change and do more to spread the good practices many local authorities and communities have already established, so that more communities can benefit and so our local democracy can thrive. Communities will be full of difference and variation. We must ensure that empowerment opportunities exist in

many forms so all citizens can have the opportunity to participate.

This action plan sets out Communities and Local Government's work towards three key outcomes:

- Greater participation, collective action, engagement in democracy;
- Changes in attitudes towards community empowerment; and
- Improved performance of public services and quality of life.

1.6 Action plan

This action plan sets out the steps Communities and Local Government is already taking, working across government and in partnership with others, to bring about lasting change in the relationship between communities and public bodies. There is a significant amount of work already in progress.

¹⁸ Varney, D (2006) *Service transformation: A better service for citizens and businesses, a better deal for the taxpayer*, London: HMT.

This plan aims to add value by bringing all the Communities and Local Government activity together in one place, making the links with our wider agendas for better and more responsive services, and highlighting areas where we want to continue working closely with colleagues in other Government Departments. This will open up opportunities for more consultation and dialogue. This plan demonstrates a commitment to being more ambitious and is a building block in a process of change. By summer 2008 we will review and report on our progress and will be developing a cross government approach to community empowerment.

The action plan sets out activities in three key areas:

- developing more opportunities locally;
- supporting and enabling citizens to take up empowerment opportunities; and
- strengthening local representative democracy.

It sets a fast pace and much of the work is already underway. Quarterly updates will be provided at www.communities.gov.uk/communities/communityempowerment and we have set up an online forum where views can be exchanged. We welcome your views on this document by 19 January 2008 and we will review our progress in Summer 2008.

Central government cannot facilitate lasting change alone. It is essential that we enable all community members, including the third sector, elected representatives, and local businesses to flourish and prosper and give local government the freedom and flexibility to work with their communities. Government is committed to ensuring that it does not place unfunded new burdens on local authorities.¹⁹

In each of the nine English regions, Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships have a key role in working together with local authorities, voluntary

and community sector organisations and partner agencies to respond to regional improvement priorities. Community empowerment is central to the improvement agenda.

¹⁹ Where financial provision has not already been made or allowed for, Government will provide additional money ensuring that no additional pressure is placed on council tax. Some actions are subject to consultation and Government will ensure that the policies it decides to take forward are funded.

The more opportunities people have to make a difference, the better they feel about the services they have helped to shape – and the better they feel about the institutions providing them. We will work closely with local authorities to develop proposals set out in the local government white paper and enable them to create a menu of opportunities locally, building on the good practice that already exists in many areas.

The environment will change significantly following new legislation:

1. We will move towards more citizen focused services with **guidance** in Spring 2008, (following public consultation), to accompany the **Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill**. This will cover the new duty to involve and the new duty to co-operate to encourage greater co-operation across the different public service providers to deliver services that meet citizens' expectations.

2. We will consult soon to shape the regulations and guidance for implementation of the new Sustainable Communities Act.

Empowerment will be embedded in particular programmes:

3. We are increasing the opportunities for people to have more of a say in **housing management** with a simplification of the process for establishing tenant management organisations, an increase in the number of asset transfers and developing options for Arms Length Management Organisations.

4. We will give citizens a greater role in **planning**, for example by increasing grant aid to Planning Aid.

5. We will embed community empowerment in all our cohesion activities.

We will promote specific approaches locally:

6. We will announce more pilot **participatory budgeting** schemes in November 2007. We will commission a survey of the extent of participatory budgeting shortly. In 2008 we will consult on a strategy with the aim of participatory budgeting being offered everywhere by 2012.

7. We will establish a number of **citizens juries** to advise on Communities and Local Government policy.

8. We will launch a consultation on local **petitions** in Autumn 2007.

9. We will publish guidance and a toolkit for **Local Charters**: voluntary agreement between Communities and Local Government, this autumn in collaboration with the Young Foundation and a trial programme with key partners in 12 areas, to run to the end of March 2008.

10. We will continue to develop online tools to support empowerment and democracy.



2.1 What is the issue?

The majority of the population in England is involved in either civic participation, informal or formal volunteering – only about one fifth do not undertake any activities.²⁰ Recent evidence suggests that youth participation in civic activities is strong. Half of all young people had given help to a group, club or organisation in the last year.²¹ Participation in **informal** volunteering was highest among young people aged 16 to 24 (40 per cent), whilst a quarter of young people aged 16-24 participated in **formal** volunteering.

We need to now widen and deepen opportunities to ensure that everyone can find a way to make a difference which best suits them and their circumstances.

We must consider how we can build on this community and civic involvement and turn it into political engagement. We must increase people's influence over service provision and local decisions and reach those who are not currently engaged in either.

Current practices are not seen as a common, integrated approach to community empowerment, but too often as isolated and unrelated initiatives. There is also no commonly recognised way of assessing the *quality* of empowerment practice.

Government can help to create the right conditions with tools such as community charters, local charters and a culture of willingness to engage with local juries or panels. But Government cannot lead community empowerment – that must come from communities themselves.

The tools may vary in different areas. Different areas will start in different places: some will need lots of support; others will be more ready to take forward some of the actions set out below.

Action 1: Secure more citizen focused services

Everyone has a role to play in creating strong and prosperous communities, with high quality and citizen focused services. In every area, councils and local public service partners are already working in partnership with local businesses, third sector organisations and local people to improve local well-being.

We will be publishing, for consultation, statutory guidance which will set out how the new legislation under the Local Government Public Involvement in Health Bill will help to empower citizens and local agencies to take this agenda to the next level. It will put the *shaping of places and empowering communities* at the heart of local government's role. It will also emphasise the need for greater co-operation, including the possibility of

²⁰ Communities and Local Government (2007) *Citizenship Survey: April – June 2007, England and Wales*.

²¹ Communities and Local Government (2007) *Citizenship Survey: April – June 2007, England and Wales*.

shared commissioning across the different public service providers to better meet the expectations of their citizens.

We want to strengthen the role of local authorities, as commissioners of services as well as direct providers. The third sector as well as the private sector is now an important provider of local public services. Communities, and sometimes individual users, need to be actively engaged and involved at each stage of the commissioning cycle²². In this way local authorities can give effect to both their duty of involvement but also, secure services which are valued by users and communities and offer best value in their functions.

The forthcoming statutory guidance will cover:

- **The role of Local Strategic Partnerships** in bringing stakeholders together to develop the shared vision for the area, convening local public services to secure better outcomes for people and places

- The importance of the **Sustainable Community Strategy** – setting the overall strategic direction and long-term vision for the economic, social and environmental well-being of a local area. It tells the proposed ‘story of the place’ – the distinctive vision and ambition of the area.
- The **duty to involve** – ensuring local partnerships further empower local communities in shaping the future of their area. This duty is not just about consulting people. It requires authorities to provide information about local decisions, policies and services. It also requires authorities to provide opportunities for more active participation in decisions and in the design, delivery and assessment of local services and policies
- The **duty to co-operate** between the local authority and ‘named partners’ in agreeing and having regard to targets in **Local Area Agreements** – cementing the shared commitment (by both local

partners and central government) to the vision for an area, and becoming in effect the delivery vehicle for the Sustainable Community Strategy

- How priorities are translated into actions through **strategic commissioning**, to ensure **best value** is secured for citizens and communities

The Bill also contains measures designed to update the patient and public involvement system. It gives local authorities a duty to contract with a host organisation to establish a Local Involvement Network (LINK). Activities will include promoting, and supporting, the involvement of people in the commissioning, provision and scrutiny of local care services; and enabling people to monitor and review the commissioning and provision of local care services.

Action 2: Implement the new Sustainable Communities Act

The Sustainable Communities Bill gives local people the opportunity to make suggestions about what they think needs

²² e.g. assessing needs, establishing priorities, securing services and selecting providers, reviewing performance & seeking service improvement.

to be done to promote the sustainability of their local community. We expect the Bill to become law very shortly. Under the legislation, the Government will invite local authorities to make proposals about how best to promote local sustainability. If they choose to make a proposal, local authorities must first consult panels of representatives of local people and try to reach agreement with them about which proposals should go forward. We will shortly begin a consultation to help shape the regulations and guidance that will be published to support this provision.

Action 3: Give tenants a greater role in housing management

Communities and Local Government's consultation on tenant empowerment during summer 2007 set out proposals to give tenants a greater voice in the management and ownership of their homes. These include:

- simplifying the Housing (Right to Manage) Regulations 1994 for local authority tenants;

- promoting a voluntary tenant management process for all social housing tenants and landlords;
- developing ways for Tenant Management Organisations to extend their role to wider services in the neighbourhood and helping smooth the way by identifying the opportunities and barriers there might be, and
- creating a National Tenant Voice.

We are also considering whether to legislate to clarify the current tenant consultation arrangements during stock transfer proposals and to allow tenants to pursue estate-based transfers. We are proposing that where a group of tenants have completed a stock options study and that the best option is a transfer of management or ownership, then the local authority would have to start the transfer process. This should increase the number of transfers going forward. And finally, we will be considering options for Arms Length Management Organisations, either led or owned by tenants.

Respect Standard for housing management

As of summer 2007, over 350 social landlords have signed up to the Respect Standard for housing management covering nearly two thirds of social housing stock. Landlords who sign the standard make a public commitment to delivering good services to help stop anti-social behaviour and create a culture of respect. The Standard asks landlords to deliver on six core commitments, including empowering and reassuring residents, with the expectation that the community will be heavily involved in the sign up process, for example, helping the landlord to identify and address any gaps in service provision. To accompany the standard a toolkit has been published on measuring success, which places prominence on the importance of involving residents in establishing local performance indicators as well as measuring progress against them.

Action 4: Give citizens a greater role in planning

Planning is also changing. The Government's proposals for the reform of development consents include proposals that government departments should consult the public on national policy statements for infrastructure sectors, such as transport, that scheme promoters should be under a statutory duty to consult local communities before submitting an application for a nationally significant infrastructure project and that inquiries into applications should be more accessible. Grant funding for bodies such as Planning Aid will be increased by £1.5 million a year to provide free professional planning advice to help local communities and individuals participate in these new arrangements.

We are also doing more to help people engage with the planning system in their area. Many local authorities already use their websites to make sure citizens and community groups are aware of planning applications in their neighbourhood, but more can be done to help citizens help themselves. We are building an e-consultation hub which will initially link

every local authority with the range of statutory bodies that need to be consulted, and next year we plan to widen this to the general public. People will be able to register the area they are interested in, and be alerted by email or possibly by SMS text message when an application is received in their area, and be able to feed back their comments on the application directly to the local authority. This will help people feel that they are able to influence decisions in their neighbourhood.

Action 5: Embed community empowerment in cohesion activities

The new Public Service Agreement (PSA) to 'build more cohesive, empowered and active communities' is about strengthening and reinforcing these associated agendas. The Government recognises that faith communities contribute to social and community cohesion through the values and activities that underpin good citizenship, such as altruism, respect for others, ethical behaviour and community solidarity.

Communities and Local Government has worked with the Citizenship Foundation to produce guidance for local authorities on how to run a Citizens' Day. Such days are aimed at building a sense of belonging and interaction in communities, and can also promote volunteering, electoral registration and empowerment more generally. This will be published in the coming weeks.

Local forums, perhaps as part of Local Strategic Partnerships are important local activities to tackle extremism. Although forums are primarily led by Muslim communities they work closely with other faiths to build community cohesion and break down barriers.

Communities and Local Government has helped Muslim communities to launch 13 forums in the last year – see Case Study 7. We aim to raise this number to 40 by April 2008.

Case Study 7: Forums against Extremism and Islamophobia

Forums bring together local communities with local authorities, the police and other local players to act as the hub for work on tackling violent extremism at a local level. They provide a safe space for local communities to discuss the problem and agree how they want to tackle it.

In many areas forums have driven forward work to tackle extremism. Reading Forum has recruited a number of community ambassadors

who have chaired and facilitated 13 road shows to discuss violent extremism. The road shows are intended to form the basis for ongoing dialogue with the local community.

The Dudley Forum feeds into its Local Strategic Partnership through existing community cohesion structures and has a strategic role in driving forward projects to tackle extremism.

Action 6: Move towards more community kitties

Participatory budgeting means giving the local community a direct say over part of a public budget and letting them decide what is most important for their community, whether it is street cleaning, leisure facilities for young people or traffic calming. It encourages debate between local people about the future of their area, and helps to build links between them. Most of all, it gives more people the confidence to be able to say “This is my community – and I want to do something about it” – see Case Study 8 for an example of how this can work in practice. There are currently ten formal participatory budgeting pilots in England.

Case Study 8: Bradford Vision Participatory Budgeting

Bradford Vision, the Local Strategic Partnership for the Bradford district, has held five participatory budgeting events over the past five years and allocated over £1M of public funds in this way.

The pilot in Keighley has allocated £130,000 from the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) programme. Over 400 residents were consulted in neighbourhoods eligible for the NRF (via door-to-door and local community events). Residents prioritised concerns under safer communities, children and young people, environment, health, housing, learning, sport and leisure and older people. Over 250 people attended the “decision day” in November 2006 and voted on over 60 projects, with 40 projects receiving funding;

residents were then also invited to “scrutiny panels” to monitor project delivery.

Evaluation of participatory budgeting in Bradford demonstrates how well they engaged with both young and old and different parts of the community. It also shows that people did not only vote for their own interests. For example, the top two spending priorities voted for in the Keighley project, where the majority of participants were from an Asian background, were neither projects for Asian groups, nor from their immediate geographical area. This demonstrates strong cohesion impacts of bringing communities together to take decisions over budgets.

“Participatory Budgeting in the UK: an evaluation from a practitioner perspective” report and research by Kezia Lavan, the Participatory Budgeting Unit, published June 2007.

We will commission a survey of existing activity shortly. We are part funding the Participatory Budgeting Unit²³, who are engaging with local authorities to roll it out further and in November 2007 we will be announcing more pilot schemes. We are keen to work with partnerships to explore how the participatory budgeting approach might be applied in the context of new Local Area Agreements, and other new contexts such as rural areas.

In 2008 we will consult on a strategy with the aim of participatory budgeting being adopted or offered everywhere by 2012. The strategy will set out how we propose to join up with other policies, for example, the 10 Year Youth Strategy²⁴ and the Government’s ambition for local authorities to be able to devolve up to 5 per cent of their budget for youth services to young people’s influence by 2010 and that, by 2018, young people could actively shape decisions on one quarter of these budgets.

²³ The Participatory Budgeting Unit is a third sector organisation run by Church Action on Poverty and part funded by Communities and Local Government, set up to provide advice and guidance to practitioners and help promote and develop participatory budgeting.

²⁴ *Aiming High for Young People: A Ten Year Strategy for Positive Activities*, 2007.

Action 7: Establish citizens' juries to help shape policy

Citizens' juries look at real issues and solutions, to help us develop and deliver policy and reflect the Government's broader commitment on engagement. Communities and Local Government will be using juries to consider issues of cohesion, migration and housing.

There are different forms of citizens' jury but all are made up of a number of randomly selected lay people who are broadly representative of the wider population. The jury is asked to consider a specific issue and hear evidence from a range of specialist witnesses before drawing their conclusions and making public recommendations. Whilst there are slightly different approaches to establishing citizens' juries in terms of size, composition and outputs, all are based on the idea of deliberative and participative democracy.

Action 8: Require a response to petitions and 'Community Calls for Action'

A community call for action²⁵ enhances the role of elected representatives to promote local people's concerns about their area, by demanding a response from their local council. In the Governance of Britain green paper we said that we would consider introducing a duty that requires local authorities to consider and investigate petitions from local communities and guarantees petitioners and the wider community a response.²⁶ See Case Study 9.

We will launch a consultation covering both these issues in the autumn of 2007.

Action 9: Develop more local charters: agreements between local authorities and communities

The local government white paper, *Strong and Prosperous Communities* states that the Government will 'encourage' the development of local charters in the form of a voluntary agreement between a local authority and a local community.²⁷ Local authorities have the freedom to decide their own policy about charters. In collaboration with the Young Foundation we will be seeking to publish guidance with a toolkit for Charters this autumn.

We are seeking ways of supporting the development of local charters. We will aim to support a number of areas to test and apply the guidance in practice during early 2008, supporting the development of local charters as the basis for engaging communities in their neighbourhood. We will aim to build in mechanisms to capture and share practitioner learning through the National Neighbourhood Management Network (NNMN). The trial programme would run to the end of March 2008.

²⁵ Communities and Local Government (2007) *Local Government Public Involvement in Health Bill*.

²⁶ Secretary of State for Justice and Lord Chancellor (2007) *The Governance of Britain* (Green Paper) London: HMSO.

²⁷ Communities and Local Government (2006) *Strong and Prosperous Communities – The Local Government White Paper*, London: TSO.

Case Study 9: Petitions in Barking and Dagenham

The first step in dealing with a petition in Barking and Dagenham is to determine how many people have signed it. If the petition has signatures from 100 or more separate addresses, it is automatically reported to the next council assembly meeting. The lead petitioner is invited to attend the assembly to present the petition and address the meeting for up to five minutes. At the meeting councillors get to question the petitioner or relevant officers for up to ten minutes. The portfolio holder concerned then responds and explains what will happen to the petition.

Depending on the petition the senior officer dealing with the petition contacts the lead petitioner, the portfolio holder and ward councillors after the meeting to tell them what action the council will be taking. The council has to notify the lead petitioner of the outcome of its consideration of the petition within two months of the assembly meeting.

Action 10: Continue to develop on-line tools to support empowerment and democracy

Supporting organisations and individuals to adopt a culture of engagement is key to widening and deepening empowerment opportunities locally. In partnership with the Ministry of Justice and the Sustainable Development Commission we will continue to develop www.peopleandparticipation.net.

New forms of information and communication on the internet have the potential to enable greater empowerment for all sections of society. Innovative tools, such as www.neighbourhoodfixit.com, allow people to report local issues, such as pavement repairs and graffiti, in a format that enables the whole community to be kept informed of progress. Communities and Local Government, working with others in government, will therefore encourage such developments.

For those who, at the moment, design and deliver local services, there will be a change in the way they work; moving away from 'top down' working, to ways of working that take the needs and wishes of communities into account and that try to meet those needs with services that are tailored to local circumstances.

National level activity will help to evaluate, spread best practice and promote empowerment:

11. We will support the **National Empowerment Partnership**, an umbrella group of national bodies, to **quality assure** community empowerment practice and share best practice

12. We will support a **network of empowering authorities**, led by a **couple of areas in each region**, who will showcase best practice in particular localities and different approaches, and trial peer learning programmes at a senior level.

13. We will have a **national 'Take Part' campaign** to promote community empowerment and we will explore how citizens can be encouraged and supported to get involved in a much more systematic and cost effective way. We will produce a **'menu' of the different opportunities** that exist, and a series of **'how to' guides** and information sources to help people get started.

14. We will mainstream empowerment as an **improvement priority** for local government.

15. The Communities Secretary will be inviting **community activists** and experts to join her in a series of roundtable **discussions** to shape our future plans: putting face to face engagement at the heart of policy-making

16. We will publish new guidance on local authority asset management, and a toolkit on how to manage the risks in **asset transfer** in Spring 2008. Workshops for local authorities and

community organisations are being held over the winter and 20 areas are being supported to develop a partnership approach to asset transfer.

Locally we want to make it easier for the individual who wants to participate, using online access.

17. We will bring forward proposals to facilitate the adoption of best practice in giving people the **performance information** they need, when they need it.

18. Over the next three years, we will invest, with the Office of the Third Sector, in the long-term sustainability of the third sector through supporting **community anchors** to develop their role in stimulating opportunities, attracting resources and supporting community sector organisations at a neighbourhood level.

19. We will support **Community Land Trusts**

20. We will **measure empowerment** and make it more visible



3.1 What is the issue?

There is an emerging body of evidence to suggest that, when service providers change the way they work and engage communities in planning and carrying out the services, there are improvements all round. Neighbourhood management, involving the local community and service providers in improving services, is working successfully in over 300 different neighbourhoods. In community safety Neighbourhood Policing is contributing to a fall in crime and is helping tackle the fear of crime. In environmental management though the Pathfinder Programme, the involvement of local people in waste management and

grounds maintenance is associated with significant improvements in the state of streets and neighbourhoods.

Action 11: Support the National Empowerment Partnership

Activity to empower citizens and communities varies in effectiveness from one area to another, and the level of understanding and commitment to its importance also varies. We are supporting the National Empowerment Partnership (NEP) to create the right conditions for more empowerment activities across the country. The Partnership is a flexible and responsive group of national organisations for whom achieving local empowerment is a key element of their work. The national bodies, include Urban Forum, the Community Sector Coalition, the IDeA and the Community Development Foundation (who are managing the NEP).

The Partnership will provide a pooled and flexible source of information which will help us measure and raise awareness of the excellent practice that exists, identify

gaps and advise those areas and organisations that need assistance in raising their game. This Partnership will seek to join up with the work of others across government who are promoting better community empowerment in relation to specific services.

Action 12: Facilitate a national network of empowering authorities

We want to shine a spotlight on local authority areas where there are specific examples of best practice in community engagement and empowerment. This will enable us both to highlight what is happening on the ground for others to learn from, and also identify and share experience of the culture change that is necessary within local authorities to support such excellent practice.

In order to achieve this, Communities and Local Government and the LGA have invited an initial group of 18 local councils to join a new network of empowering authorities, based on their existing involvement in a range of established programmes and initiatives, including Communities and Local Government's Civic Pioneers network.

Our aims will be to:

- spotlight and publicise examples of best practice in community engagement and empowerment, either in a particular neighbourhood or locality, or dealing with a specific interest group or theme;
- promote learning amongst councillors and officers, through a programme managed by the IDeA, in order to support the kind of culture change necessary to make real progress;
- provide a mechanism for the authorities in the network to contribute to national thinking from their experience.

Our primary focus will be to encourage information dissemination and peer learning in ways that can be replicated and shared in the longer term, in partnership with the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships. This will assist authorities both with preparing for the introduction of the Duty to involve, and with responding to the empowerment indicators now available within the national indicator set. As empowerment is embedded within the

national indicators we hope that this network will guide all local authorities to the tools they could use to embed good empowerment practice by 2010. In this we believe that the network will be entirely complementary to the ongoing Beacon Council scheme, which recognises, through a competitive process, excellence in particular functions and services.

Support for capacity building will be further helped by the publication in the Autumn of a National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy which will be implemented in March 2008

Action 13: Have a 'Take Part' campaign

Many people who would like to get involved and have a say simply aren't aware of the opportunities. Some may not realise that their skills and experience could be used to inform local services; others may not realise how easy it can be to get involved. A national campaign will help get the message across and introduce potentially millions of people to the opportunities available locally to make a difference to their street, neighbourhood or community.

There are many ways for people to get involved in decisions locally; they can train for the magistracy, stand for the council, take part in the governance of the local school or PCT, or set up a residents group or neighbourhood forum to bring people together or join a local neighbourhood management set up. To help people find the way and know how to tackle an issue that concerns them locally, we will produce a 'menu' of the different opportunities that exist, and a series of 'how to' guides and information sources to help them get started and signpost people to further information sources as part of the development of the Together We Can section of the DirectGov website (www.direct.gov.uk/togetherwecan).

We will also consider how to set up a clear point of entry for an individual who wants to participate, provide them with information and match their skills to opportunities. This would mean that people who apply for a civic role, but are not successful, have an opportunity to take on another such role. At the simplest end, this could mean providing someone who had been unsuccessful in becoming a magistrate with information about how

to become a member of a Youth Justice Panel. At a more complex level, it could involve formal exchange of CVs between organisations or an IT based system. Alternatively, people whose term expires as a governor or magistrate may be encouraged to take on a different type of role.

Communities and Local Government will explore the uses of new technology to enable people to understand better opportunities for participation, and work with other government departments to encourage this.

Action 14: Mainstream empowerment as an improvement priority

In each of the nine English regions, Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships have a key role in working together with local authorities, voluntary and community sector organisations and partner agencies to respond to regional improvement priorities. Regional action plans are designed to ensure that people across the region can work with

government to improve the way services are delivered. Support for capacity building will be further helped by the publication in the autumn of a National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy which will be implemented in March 2008. Communities and Local Government will reflect the importance of community empowerment as a mainstream part of the improvement agenda and work with the LGA and IDeA to ensure that the regional improvement architecture supports councils who want to develop their empowerment activity.

Action 15: Open up direct dialogue with local activists

We need local community activists to work with us to tell us what is really happening and influence our thinking about policies. Throughout the Autumn and 2008 and in different parts of the country, the Secretary of State will be inviting community activists and others with hands on experience to join her in a series of roundtable discussions and regional events to consider how activities

designed to give citizens more influence are actually working on the ground. This will help to shape our future plans: putting face to face engagement at the heart of our approach to policy-making. Activists will in turn be encouraged to come forward as empowerment champions and help raise awareness of engagement opportunities so that these are widely utilised by the public.

Action 16: Transfer more assets to communities

In many areas local authorities have already transferred assets such as disused buildings or old swimming pools. The government is implementing fully recommendations on how to boost the transfer of public assets, such as land, buildings or facilities, into the control of communities – see case study 10. A consortium led by the Development Trusts Association is supporting partnerships in 20 areas to demonstrate what works and find the best practice to help others.²⁸

²⁸ Quirk, B. (2007) *Making Assets Work: the Quirk Review of Community Management and Ownership of Public Assets*, London: Communities and Local Government.

New guidance on local authority asset management and a toolkit on how to manage the risks in asset transfer, will be published in Spring 2008. Workshops for local authorities and community organisations are being held over the winter. At the same time, we intend to do more to accelerate the process of asset transfer and will be making further announcements shortly.

Case Study 10: Gamblesby Village Hall, Cumbria

The example of Gamblesby Village Hall in Cumbria illustrates how community ownership of a key local building can contribute significantly to restoring the morale of a declining neighbourhood.

Over the last few decades, Gamblesby's population has fallen to below 200 and those remaining have watched its public facilities gradually disappear. The foot and mouth epidemic in 2001 was the final straw for the local economy but, led by an energetic and visionary chair, a local action group was formed and decided that revitalising the village hall would be an important element in and also a symbol of the village's recovery. The building itself was built with an endowment to the village from a farmer in the nineteenth century. On the strength of this the village mounted a successful campaign to

reclaim it from the local council and place it in the ownership of a village hall trust. The trust went on to secure funding from a range of sources to renovate the hall and bring it back into use.

The result is that now Gamblesby has an attractive focal point for their social activities that is sustainable and secure and has a planned maintenance programme in place to prevent future maintenance crises. The project has done much to restore pride in the community and some economic opportunities may also be opening up through the establishment of the hall as a venue and the associated demand for catering. The whole process has enabled local people to develop skills and increased confidence that may open up future avenues for collective activity to benefit the village.

Action 17: Provide timely information about performance

The Governance of Britain green paper said that Government will work with local authorities and public service providers in England to ensure that there is wide spread use of 'real-time' data.²⁹ This means that communities will need to be provided with regular and accessible information on their local services in order to judge the effectiveness of those services and to be able to see where their involvement has affected decision making and outcomes. We have commissioned research into what practices are effective and meet the needs of citizens, on the basis of which we will bring forward proposals to encourage best practice in giving people the performance information they need, when they need it – see case study 11.

Case Study 11: Timely information about performance

Five out of six of the Berkshire Unitary authorities have opted to employ the Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service Performance Management Information system for monitoring the Local Area Agreements. The system currently enables partners to submit data to the fire service who put it onto the system, usually on a quarterly basis. The advantage of the

system is that it is web-based so that partners, including Government Offices can access it to review progress based on the latest data. The authorities have recently agreed to input information directly to provide updates on a more regular basis. The system will also have the ability to map incidents in order to identify hot spots.

²⁹ *Governance of Britain* July 2007, Ministry of Justice.

Action 18: Invest in the long term sustainability of the third sector through funding to support community anchor organisations

Large neighbourhood based organisations increasingly known as community anchors, play a vital role in supporting other community sector groups. They are often social enterprises, able to generate income through trading and contracting and through the ownership or management of an asset base. They play a unique role, recognised within communities and by external agencies and are able to act as an intermediary between these agencies and grassroots activity. They can deliver services beyond the capacity of smaller groups, operate as a platform for community activity, facilitate wider community forums and networks and can negotiate on behalf of the local community sector.

Therefore, over the next three years we will invest, with the Office of the Third Sector, in supporting community anchors

to develop their role at a neighbourhood level to help build strong and sustainable communities through providing spaces to meet, supporting the community sector, providing services, providing advocacy and voice and stimulating community involvement and activity.

Action 19: Support Community Land Trusts

Community Land Trusts are a mechanism for ownership of land by the community, taking it out of the market and ensuring the impact of land appreciation is taken out of consideration. This enables longer term affordable development. We will monitor the pilots led by Salford University and the Housing Corporation to learn from a proven model enabling communities to take an increased level of control of their future and can give community organisations a sustainable income stream for regeneration and improvement of their area.

Action 20: Measure empowerment and make it visible

It will be possible for Local Authorities and their partners to prioritise empowerment through their Local Area Agreement and we are encouraging this wherever appropriate, through co-operation with the Local Government Association and through the programmes of the national, regional and local networks supported by the National Empowerment Partnership. In all areas these indicators will also form part of the evidence that will be reviewed by the Audit Commission in carrying out the Comprehensive Area Assessments. In addition we will take steps to make citizens themselves aware of the full potential of their participative role by including information on levels of empowerment and participation in timely data to be disseminated in localities.

People are motivated to sign a petition, sign up to a cause or donate, but we need to translate this willingness to participate in single issues into renewed enthusiasm for local decisions and bring new life and verve to our local democracy.

21. We are working with the Local Government Association to establish a 'concordat' to guide the relations between central and local government

22. We will publish the recommendations of the Councillors Commission in December 2007 and deliver an implementation plan in early 2008.

23. In partnership with other Government Departments and the Local Government Association we will consider how to improve local accountability and leadership for a range of public services.



4.1 What is the issue?

We believe that participatory and representative forms of democracy are complementary and we think it is vital that elected representatives are at the heart of the empowerment agenda.

At a national level, there has been increased disengagement from formal political processes in recent years which is particularly marked among young people. At a local level, young people often lack awareness of their local political structures, can feel that there is no relevance to them or that the council has no interest in their

opinion. Young people can therefore end up feeling alienated from local decision making due to lack of youth representation. It is vital that we address the decline in turnout at local and general elections and increase interest in making local decisions which matter.

We recognise the need to attract a broader range of talented people from all backgrounds to stand and serve as councillors. Building on a commitment in the local government white paper “Strong and Prosperous Communities” the Secretary of State established an independent commission with cross party and non party membership. The Councillors Commission will report to the Secretary of State with recommendations relating to its remit. That is to make recommendations regarding the incentives and barriers to:

- encouraging suitably able, qualified and representative people to be candidates to serve as councillors of principal authorities;
- their retention and development once elected, or appointed under

the Local Government Act 2000; and

- their being able to secure public interest and recognition for the work they carry out for their communities.

The IDeA’s National Census of Local Authority Councillors 2006 confirmed that today’s councillors are not recruited from across the social spectrum. Instead they are drawn disproportionately from certain sections of society. The latest findings from the 2006 Census of Local Authority Councillors revealed that two out of three councillors in England are male, compared to just under half of the adult population and nearly all are white compared to nine out of ten of the adult population. The average age of councillors is 58.3.³⁰ We want to reach out to attract a wider range of people with untapped talent and different perspectives, especially young people, women and people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. It is also important that people feel that they are adequately represented.

Action 21: Establish a concordat between central and local government

We are working with the Local Government Association to establish a ‘concordat’ to guide the relations between central and local government. This would, if agreed, establish for the first time an agreement on the rights and responsibilities of local government, including its responsibilities to provide effective leadership of local areas and to empower local communities.

“Everything possible should be done to help people to enter public service such as this as it has been the most rewarding, enjoyable, invigorating thing I have ever done. You really can wake up with a smile on your face and count your blessings.”

(A local councillor)

³⁰ IDeA (2007) *National Census of Local Authority Councillors in England 2006*, London: Improvement and Development Agency.

Action 22: Strengthen the role of local councillors

The Councillors' Commission will publish its recommendations in December 2007. The Commissioners have taken in-depth soundings on issues as wide ranging as the public perception of councillors, ways to increase the diversity of candidates, the attitudes of employers and how to improve support to elected members. We will respond with the government's implementation plan in early 2008 with measures to strengthen the role of local councillors and transform the relationship between communities and the town hall.

Action 23: Greater local accountability and clearer local leadership

There is already experience of electing local people directly into significant public service roles – for example on to the boards of Foundation Hospital Trusts. Changes are being made in neighbourhood policing following the Flanagan Review³¹. In partnership with other government departments and the LGA we will consider how to improve local accountability and leadership for a

Case Study 12: New Deal for Community Partnership Boards

NDCs have implemented a range of projects which have actively engaged and supported local people to enable progression into public governance. An example of this has been the innovative use of formal Board elections which 34 of 39 NDC Partnerships have used to select community Board representatives, often achieving turnouts higher than those achieved by local council elections.

Candidates stood because they 'wanted to give something back' or were 'concerned with local quality of life issues'.

Some partnership elections greatly exceeded predictions because of factors such as high levels of local media coverage and relatively well known people standing.

NDC partnerships have also implemented imaginative programmes of support for people involved in the governance of their partnership, with support including: staff teams ensuring resident members and new agency representatives are fully briefed through pre-meetings, induction sessions for new members, mentoring schemes whereby existing members provide information and guidance to new representatives, and visits to other NDCs to share experiences.

These initiatives have led to a number of local residents from disadvantaged communities, progressing into further areas of public life including participating on other agency boards, and standing as local councillors.

Source: NDC Network (2006) *Strong and Prosperous Communities: New Deal for Communities Shaping Places and People*.

³¹ Flanagan, R. (2007) *The Review of Policing: Interim Report*. London: Home Office.

range of public services, including the police and the NHS; and the impact of this on the role of councillors, and councillors' democratic mandate.

At the moment local authority overview and scrutiny committees can require information only in relation to services provided by the authority itself, with the exception of health matters (which are the subject of health legislation). This will change with the passage of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill and commencement of the crime and disorder scrutiny provisions in the Police and Justice Act 2006, which will extend this power for councils responsible for Local Area Agreements to require information from all the public service providers who are 'named' LAA partners (such as police authorities or the Environment Agency).

Regulations on the scrutiny of health and crime and disorder matters may provide that scrutiny committees can require the attendance of health and crime and disorder partners before a scrutiny committee. However, the Bill provides that other named LAA partners may choose how to provide this information

i.e. whether by attending a hearing, or in writing.

We will be working closely with colleagues in other Government Departments to consider how the extension of this power will work in practice and how best we can work together.



Endorsements

This action plan brings together many strands of work, many of which are ongoing. The kind of change required to bring about real devolution to local people cannot be made by Communities and Local Government alone. It will take a partnership of many public bodies, local government, communities organisations and networks working together.

We look forward to working you all in the months and years to come.

"Healthy, thriving local communities are ones where local people feel able to get involved and influence local decision making. Voluntary and Community Organisations have a crucial role to play in supporting the participation of individuals and communities. This action plan demonstrates the commitment of government to strengthen community engagement, providing an opportunity to put measures in place that will enable and support local communities and local people."

Stuart Etherington, Chief Executive,
National Council for Voluntary
Organisations

"A vibrant local democracy requires a partnership between local authorities, citizens and communities and the broader third sector. We share Hazel Blears' vision of "flourishing, confident communities" and will work with her and local government to achieve them."

Stephen Bubb, Chief Executive, ACEVO

"This is a welcome commitment to supporting real shifts of power within communities across the country – and to moving the field of community empowerment from words to action."

Geoff Mulgan, Director, Young Foundation

"The evidence is clear and compelling that citizen empowerment leads to improved services and better outcomes for people. Every successful organisation, regardless of sector, strives to understand its customers, but for public services the challenge is to go beyond this and directly involve the people who use services in shaping them. The new Comprehensive Area Assessment will include an evaluation of how well councils and their partners are engaging with local people

to better understand their needs. The Audit Commission will also be looking for evidence that services have been genuinely shaped by the input of those who rely on them."

Michael O'Higgins, Chairman, Audit Commission

"Local government is indispensable to the effective empowerment of local communities. The action plan sends out a very positive signal on the role local authorities will be playing in taking this agenda forward in the coming months."

Barry Quirk, Chairman, SOLACE

"The Community Sector Coalition welcomes Communities and Local Government's commitment to strengthening community empowerment. We look forward to working closely with the department in achieving the culture change that will deliver lasting improvements in public sector performance"

Ben Hughes, Community Sector Coalition

"The Community Development Foundation welcomes Communities and Local Government's re-emphasis on community empowerment, which is a fundamental outcome of applying community development principles and approaches when working with citizens and communities. CDF looks forward to working through the National Empowerment Partnership to raise awareness of good local empowerment practice and to help improve the quality and consistency of activities that increase the capacity of people to influence the decisions that affect their lives."

Alison Seabrook, Chief Executive, Community Development Foundation

"Local authorities need to work closely with citizens and community organisations as part of their leadership role. IDeA is pleased to be associated with this Action Plan and to build on existing experiences of the local government sector, supporting local councils to drive their own improvement."

Lucy de Groot, Executive Director, IDeA

Contact us

We would welcome your views on the actions set out in this plan. We have set up an online forum at:

<http://haveyoursay.communities.gov.uk/forums>

The feedback we receive will shape our ongoing cross-government programme.

Please contact us by 19 January 2008 with your comments and responses to the questions below:

Widening and deepening empowerment opportunities locally (Action Points 1-10)

- Which actions do you think are most important to empower people in your community and why?
- What other activities do you think would encourage local people to participate more and have more influence in your community?

Supporting and enabling people to take up empowerment opportunities (Action Points: 11-20)

- What other support would you like a) national, b) local government and c) the community and voluntary sector to provide to help you take up local empowerment opportunities?

Strengthening local representative democracy (Action Points: 21-23)

- How would you encourage people to be less disengaged in local democracy?
- Can you suggest any other ways to increase people's opportunity to be engaged with their local area?

Alternatively you can contact us about the action plan at:

Community Empowerment Action Plan
Community Empowerment Division
Communities and Local Government
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London
SW1E 5DU

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