



Communities in Control - Empowerment White Paper 2008

FAQs

So what's it all about?

The White Paper, 'Communities In Control', sets out the Government's vision for the future of democracy, society and the relationship between citizens and the State. Secretary of State, Hazel Blears has made it clear she wants power to pass into the hands of local communities. In the future local people should have a greater say over decisions and be more involved in politics.

The White Paper sets out a range of measures to strengthen democracy – representative and participative. It also acknowledges the important role of the third sector and independent community action.

Haven't we heard that before?

You could be forgiven for thinking that this all sounds quite familiar, and a lot of what's in 'Communities in Control' restates or builds on what was in the Local Government White Paper (and subsequent Act). It also draws on the Governance of Britain Green Paper about strengthening democracy and political engagement. But there are quite a lot of new measures too.

What's in it?

There's more than can be covered here in full, but among the most significant proposals are;

- * A duty to promote democracy to be placed on local authorities to encourage people to get involved in politics.
- * A duty to respond to petitions from the local community – people will be able to raise issues and problems, call for a referendum to elect a mayor, or to have a say over how money is spent (Participatory Budgeting).
- * There will be a national Participatory Budgeting (PB) strategy to introduce PB in all areas by 2012.
- * Councils will be encouraged to do things differently, like holding meetings in community venues and inviting people to suggest topics for discussion.
- * The duty to involve local people will be extended to include other public bodies like Regional Development Agencies
- * At a more local level, community councils are being encouraged, community contracts will be expanded and 'Community Pledgebanks' (where individuals commit to doing things in their communities) will be trialled.
- * Community involvement in the planning system will be increased with support for local authorities, planners and the third sector.

- * More buildings and land will be transferred to community ownership or management from councils and other public sector bodies.
- * A 'Community Allowance' will be piloted to allow people to do community work whilst continuing to claim benefits.

What about support for the third sector?

There's very little 'new' money but a few programmes that had been delayed were announced. There's a range of support for the third sector on offer including:

- * A £70m Communitybuilders fund (previously referred to as a 'community anchors fund')
- * £7.5m Empowerment Fund for national third sector organisations (replacing the Strategic Partners fund which was scrapped last year)
- * A TakePart local pathfinder programme for active citizenship and £2m to support disabled people to volunteer
- * An expansion of the current Asset Transfer programme

How can people get involved?

There are a few consultations that will take place over the next few months (petitions, empowerment fund etc) which you can respond to.

It's worth thinking about the new measures that are being introduced and pilot schemes and see whether you (or your Local Authority) might be interested in trying them. To do this you might first need to find out more about what's being proposed, so have a look at Urban Forum's policy briefing or the White Paper itself.

You might like to think about;

- * Trialling Participatory Budgeting in your area
- * Establishing a new community council or a community contract
- * Setting up a 'pledgebank' in your neighbourhood
- * How you might get more involved in the planning system, or suggesting a building or other 'asset' that could be transferred to community ownership or management.
- * How petitions might be used in your area to raise issues or make something happen.

Any other suggestions?

Yes, there are three things to be which might help you ...

1. **Be creative** – the White Paper calls for new ways of doing things to achieve its vision. What ideas do you have?
2. **Be proactive** – be prepared to take your ideas to the Council, Local Strategic Partnership or others. Don't wait for things to just happen....make them happen.
3. **Be practical** – think about how the policies might be put into practice in your area and how they might work.

Where can I find out more?

Urban Forum has produced a slightly longer (4 page) Policy Briefing on 'Communities In Control' that's available on our website – www.urbanforum.org.uk/new. The Briefing includes links to other relevant information and publications for you to explore.

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