

# ***Communities in control:* empowering local communities?**

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# Aims of the EWP

“I will count it as a success if in five years from now we have more people coming out to vote, more people understanding local politics, more people having a real say in decisions they care about, more people stepping up to stand as local councillors’

Hazel Blears, launching *Communities in Control*

- Proposals requiring legislation – in *Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill* (Dec 2008) and *Community Empowerment Bill* (2009?), e.g.
  - Duty to promote democracy
  - Duty to respond to petitions
- Other proposals, consultations and reviews, e.g.
  - national strategy on Participatory Budgeting
  - Empowering the Frontline Taskforce
  - Redress Review
- sits alongside statutory guidance on Duty to Involve, CCfA, Sustainable Communities

# Context

‘Local Government White Paper’ –  
*Strong and Prosperous Communities* (2006)

Local Government & Public Involvement in Health Act 2007

Statutory Guidance for LGPIH (July 2008)

Sustainable Communities Act 2007

Comprehensive Area Assessment

Participatory Budgeting Strategy (Sept. 2008)

# Reasons to be cheerful

“At last the notion of ‘empowerment’ is given an official airing after years on the margins”

“I think back to 8 or 9 years ago when I was told I shouldn’t be using the word ‘empowerment’ in a paper I was drafting because it would scare the horses”

“I like the fact that this paper tries to think of ways to make politics fun and something to be proud of engaging in”

# Show us the money!

- **Empowerment Fund:** £7.5m, 20 or so national organisations
- **Communitybuilders Fund:** £70m to help community organisations become 'economically viable social enterprises' (replaces the delayed Community Anchors programme)
- **Grassroots Grants:** £80m (OTS) small grants £500-£5000
- **Regional Empowerment Partnerships** – managed by CDF
- **Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships** – average £5m per year per region

# “words are great, funding is better”

“If a community worker or community group read the ambition of the paper for ‘communities in control’ and ask where they fit in and what funds they will get, then I’m unsure what our answer is.”

“How much money will reach down to local community-based organisations that work with communities?”

“Social enterprise is not an excuse to stop giving grants”

# Promoting politics

- Duty to Promote Democracy – ‘democratic hub’
- Voting incentives
- Internships etc for young people
- Take Part pilots and citizenship education in schools
- Standing for office – job descriptions, remote voting, accreditation

“The best voting incentive is that their vote makes a difference”

“The increase in social inequality lies at the base of decreasing participation – seeing MPs salaries go up, expenses paid without receipts – especially if they struggle to make ends meet or work with a community that has to beg for every £50 or £500 to work with”

# Influence and accountability

- Duty to respond to petitions – ‘petition power’
- Scrutiny of public officials – public hearings triggered by petitions
- Duty to Involve extended
- Overview and scrutiny – higher profile
- Community contracts – obligations on both sides
- Review of redress arrangements
- Participatory Budgeting Strategy

# Collective empowerment

“There are some potentially useful things in here for individual community activists but I wait to see how much of it actually empowers the frontline community and voluntary groups who sustain the individual and help articulate their needs and visions.”

“Actions like petitions are seen to stand alone, not part of collective consideration of issues. Raising local issues should be a process of collectivisation and reflection.”

# Empowering processes

“It talks about mechanisms – fine. But it doesn’t seem to recognize that the ways those things are put in place and carried out could be more, or less, empowering, depending on the approach taken. In fact there is the potential for disempowerment and disengagement if some of those things are delivered badly.”

“The already powerful people in society will take advantage of promoting democracy and the already less powerful will be left behind again”

“There needs to be an extra layer of activity designed to help nurture the fit between the top-down systems and community systems... two very different organisational cultures and power systems interacting with some dire effects ...”

“There’s an assumption that community groups (and other elements of the third sector) are miraculously there and will remain”

# Recognition for community development

‘We support the role of community development workers as a catalyst for active citizenship. However there are too few...’

‘We are therefore keen to support local authorities and LSPs who want to prioritise community development, by enabling other frontline workers to do more community building.’

- Empowering the Frontline Taskforce
- Support Academy for Sustainable Communities training for non-CD workers
- Support CD Challenge group to produce information

“The importance of professional community work intervention is badly undervalued in this paper”

“Proper, actual mainstreaming of community development will take a generation, if not more”

# Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA)

- review of *area* and organisations
- key driver to deliver ‘empowerment activity’
- reporting seen as key way for local people to hold partners to account
- will assess implementation of Duty to Involve
  - how well council/partners know communities, esp vulnerable/marginalised
  - how well they engage with them, involvement in defining priorities and assessing outcomes
  - co-ordination of partners’ community engagement
  - self assessment

£\$\$\$£

Danger

£\$\$\$£

- Easy target for cuts
- Need to make economic case:
  - Consultation and involvement leads to better targeting of services
  - Investment now will pay long term dividends – child protection, youth offending
  - Save money by co-ordinating involvement and engagement
  - Strengthens cohesion by involving people in tough allocation decisions
  - Deflects criticism of members

# Culture shift?

Aspiration “to embed a culture of engagement and empowerment”

“This is the future... local councils being judged, held accountable, evaluated by your residents”  
*(Cameron to Conservative Councillors Association)*

LibDems - devolution and localism, ‘people power’



“This is the new political territory. Neither the right nor the left has yet, in truth, fully come to terms with it.”

*Alan Milburn*