

# ***Communities in control: real people, real power***

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## A lot has been achieved ...

- **60% of people trust their local council.** This represents a statistically significant upward trend since 2001 when the equivalent figure was only 52%.
- In England: 9% of people have undertaken at least one civic activism activity and **40% of people have engaged in civic participation** in the last 12 months.
- **Participation in civic activism is strongly linked to a sense of being able to influence local decision-making.**
- The majority of respondents to the 2007 Audit of Political Engagement state that they want to have a say in how the country is run (69%) suggesting **a degree of latent demand**

## ... but people continue to feel unable to influence local decisions

- **60% of people do not feel they are given an adequate say** on how local council services are run
- More than **90% of people believed the accountability** of their councils could be improved
- Nearly **40% of people do not feel councillors are representative** of their communities and nearly 60% do not believe they adequately reflect their views
- Only **38% of people in England agree that they can influence decisions in their local area**
- **Overall satisfaction with local government has declined** by a small amount since 2003-04, following greater decline between 2000-01 and 2003-04



**The purpose of this White Paper is to transfer power from government to citizens and communities – and so promote more empowered citizens and put communities in control**

## Challenging aims



To pass power into the hands of local communities:

- generate a more vibrant local democracy
  - representative and participative
  - make politics more attractive and respected
  - strong third sector role
- give more control over local decisions and services
  - creating a wider pool of active citizens



## Principles of empowerment

Many people are increasingly disconnected from democracy – reforms must be focused around the citizen

Challenge and debate are good things – make politics respectable

No conflict between representative and participative democracy – local authorities play a vital role at the heart of democratic and civic engagement

Third sector has a crucial role to play – in aggregation and advocacy

Citizen participation has a crucial role to play in public service reform – in quality and efficiency



Narrative and evidence base as important as content:

- no “golden bullet” but widespread change in culture and practice
- change terms of debate
- not final word but longer-term process

Make new systems make sense to citizen:

- adapt democracy and government to societal change

<b>Mechanism</b>	<b>What it means for a citizen</b>
More active citizens	Living in a cohesive community, having a sense of my public role
Access to information	Being able to find out information in a way I can understand
Having a say	Letting my views be known and getting feedback when I do express my views
Having an influence	Influencing decisions being made on my behalf by both elected and non elected people
Challenge	Holding the people who exercise power in my locality to account
Redress	Getting swift and fair redress when things go wrong
Standing for Office	Getting involved as an elected representative in my locality
Ownership and control	Owning and running local services with other local people





## Communities and places

Build more cohesive, empowered and active communities:

- people from different backgrounds get on well in their local area
- people have meaningful interactions with those from different backgrounds
- people feel they belong to their neighbourhood
- people feel they can influence decisions in their locality
- thriving third sector
- people participate in culture or sport



## Key propositions

- Support for volunteers and community building
- Duty on councils to promote democracy and incentives to vote
- Measures to improve engagement of police and police authorities, key regeneration agencies, and criminal justice, arts, sporting, cultural and environmental organisations
- Practical steps to support local councillors and increase visibility and accountability of local authorities and other local service providers
- Petitions to elevate debate and drive change
- Citizens' access to data
- Major role for third sector in implementation
- Participatory Budgeting, asset transfer, redress, workforce reforms



## What will be different ... for local authorities

- new Take Part local pathfinder programme
- Data Interchange Hub and piloting innovative approaches to sharing information with citizens and community groups
- Local Democracy and Petitions duties;
- extended Duty to Involve
- Overview and Scrutiny reforms
- Participatory Budgeting and asset transfer
- Redress and Workforce reviews
- support for Councillors



- Consultation
- Community Empowerment, Housing and Economic Regeneration Bill
- Implementation Plan

