

26/10/06**LOCAL GOVERNMENT WHITE PAPER,
STRONG AND PROSPEROUS COMMUNITIES**

The National Association has today produced a media release and briefing response to the Local Government White Paper, *Strong and prosperous communities*. The documents, which are included, can serve as a template when dealing with queries from the local and regional media. We are more than happy to handle any queries from CALCs or media outlets on these matters. Also attached is a press release from DCLG.

NALC Media Release**26th October 2006****True devolution starts now****NALC's response to the Local Government White Paper,
*Strong and prosperous communities***

The Local Government White Paper, *Strong and prosperous communities*, gives a real chance for local people to access the levers of power and influence in their communities.

The paper will, according to NALC (National Association of Local Councils), lead to a substantial shift of power and influence from Whitehall to town halls, and town halls to local communities. It will also create simplified opportunities to set up democratic local community bodies in urban and rural areas. Central Government and principal local government will have to open up to public influence over mainstream services. And with this local communities will be able to challenge and call local public service delivery agencies to account.

Cllr Ken Cleary, chairman, NALC, said: "Local communities feel that they have a lack of control over the way public services and functions are delivered to them, and this is leading to disenchantment with those in power. The Local Government White Paper, *Strong and prosperous communities*, now gives opportunities for local people, via neighbourhood vehicles like parish and town councils to have a better say or a larger degree of ownership over services they use in their daily lives."

John Findlay, chief executive, NALC commented: "With the publication of the Local Government White paper, *Strong and prosperous communities*, there should be a renewed drive to bring about change in local government and this should be focused in neighbourhood arrangements. Within this, parish and town councils should be able to take on more services from other tiers of local government, if they so wish. Our task is to work closely with Government to guarantee an extended and developed role for existing and new

town and parish councils, ensuring that they are the focal point for all community stakeholders to come together.

NALC Media Briefing – Local Government White Paper

The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) believes that the time is right for a true and complete shift in attitude from central government with regards to devolving power to local communities. The Local Government White Paper, '*Strong and prosperous communities*', has achieved a step in the right direction with regards to giving local people and communities more influence and power to improve their lives.

The three key messages, from NALC are:

1. Local communities are demanding and need access to the levers of power through more control and better representation over the way public services are delivered in their local area. Government commissioned research by BMG released on 23rd October, showed that only 21% of respondents say they are satisfied with their principal authority (county, district, borough or unitary council). Two-thirds of those surveyed said they did not believe that they could influence decisions affecting their area, while nearly half did not feel their councils did enough for people like them.
2. Ownership and control over public service delivery should be at the closest appropriate level of governance to local people. Where the public service does not reside in the hands of local people, then local communities must have a say in the direction and method of those services.
3. Neighbourhood/local community governance is relevant and should be implemented in any part of the country, regardless of urban, suburban or rural location. In other words, it should be much easier and simpler to set up neighbourhood democratic community councils. Further to this it is very important that the barrier to creating such bodies in London is removed

NALC wants the Local Government White Paper, *Strong and prosperous communities*, to deliver in the following areas.

A **'general power of well being'**, allowing councils to spend on any activity which is for the benefit of the community. This would remove the shackles and give local communities the space, confidence and power to innovate across the board of public service delivery. This power should be extended to all parish and town councils, who have satisfied governance criteria based on the Quality Status scheme.

- **'Community calls for action'** to enable local communities to summon public service providers to explain and rectify deficiencies in service delivery. This power will influence a wide range of decisions; from planning to the way mainstream services like policing and education are delivered at the neighbourhood level. So local people can call principal authorities and public agencies to account.

- A power for parish councils to change their name, if they wish, from a prescribed list: **'local council', 'village council', 'neighbourhood council' or 'community council'**. It has often been coherently argued that the title parish in this context is confused with religious contentions. The new umbrella or collective term for this tier of local governance could be **'community council'**. Importantly NALC supports councils that wish to remain parish councils, we feel a flexible approach is very important in all this.

- **A range of options for local community governance**, from which communities would choose what suited them best, including:
 - 1) a new town or parish council

 - 2) lead ward principal authority councillors with new powers and devolved budgets

 - 3) town or neighbourhood managers

 - 4) community forums with devolved budgets

 - 5) ward councillor participation in parish and town council meetings

- New simpler procedures for the **creation of new parish and town councils**

- A programme to enable communities to set up **new parish and town councils, especially in urban areas**

- New legislation to provide for town and parish councils to be created in **London**

- Reinforcement of guidance to ensure proper **devolution of powers and functions from principal authorities**

Notes for Editor

1. The National Association of Local Councils is the national representative body for 10,000 community, parish and town councils throughout England and Wales. In all, there are over 80,000 town, parish and community councillors throughout England and Wales. These councillors, who serve electorates ranging from small rural communities to major towns, are all independently elected. The councils have powers to raise their own funds through council tax. Community, parish and town councils provide employment for over 25,000 staff while their annual expenditure exceeds

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£400 million. Together, they can be identified as the nation's single most influential grouping of grassroots opinion-formers. Over 15 million people live in communities served by 10,000 community, parish and town councils nationally - this represents improvements for up to 30% of the population.

2. For more information on the Local Government White Paper, *Strong and prosperous communities*, please visit www.communities.gov.uk
3. The Quality Status Scheme was developed jointly by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Department of Communities and Local Government with the collaboration of key stakeholders such as the Local Government Association, the National Association of Local Councils and the Commission for Rural Communities. For more information: www.nalc.gov.uk

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This briefing was issued by Alan Jones, Head of Communications

Strong and Prosperous Communities: Kelly Unveils New Vision for Local Government

DCLG News Release 2006/0125

26 October 2006

Communities Secretary Ruth Kelly today published new proposals significantly strengthening leadership and devolving power to local government as well as providing a major expansion of opportunities for local people to influence local decision-making and improve their lives.

The White Paper *Strong and Prosperous Communities* builds a new settlement between central government, local government and citizens. It brings more freedoms and powers for local government and local people to shape their own communities, it radically reduces national targets whilst strengthening local accountability and puts in place new measures to ensure local services are more responsive to their communities.

Prime Minister, Tony Blair said:

"Good local government makes a huge difference to our lives. From the moment we step outside our front door it is about how our neighbourhoods look and feel, to the quality of our schools and the facilities in our local park. Good local authorities benefit from strong and accountable leaders who are in touch with confident communities who will fight for what is best."

Communities Secretary Ruth Kelly said:

"Local authorities and the services they provide in partnership with others are hugely important to the health and strength of our communities and country. Since 1997, the Government has provided significant investment to expand capacity and set a strong direction nationally. Combined with the hard work and commitment of local councillors, the local government workforce and other partners, this has led to real improvements in local public service delivery.

For the next phase of reform we need to respond to new challenges. The increasing complexity and diversity of these – from climate change to tackling deep-rooted social exclusion - demand more flexibility at the local level. Expectations of citizens are rising fast. They rightly want more choice over the services they receive, more influence over those who provide them and higher service standards.

We therefore propose a new settlement with local government, communities and citizens. We will give local authorities a stronger role in leading their communities and bringing services together to address local needs and problems. Central government will play its part in guaranteeing minimum standards and setting overall national goals but we will step back and allow more freedom and flexibility at the local level.

In exchange, we expect to see more accountability to local citizens, stronger local leadership, better and more efficient services and a readiness to support tougher intervention when things go wrong. The White Paper sets out how we intend to achieve this re-balancing between central government, local government and local people."

Just some of the proposals in the wide-ranging White Paper include:

Stronger and more stable local authority leadership

Leadership will be put on a firmer footing than ever before by requiring councils to change to one of three strong leadership models.

- Directly Elected Mayor with a four year term - a directly elected individual
- Directly Elected Executive with a four year term - alongside electing a mayor or council leader voters also directly elect the council's cabinet
- Council leader with a four year term - voters elect councillors, and then councillors chose the council leader

At present, many council leaders are elected on an annual basis which can discourage strong, ambitious and stable leadership. All three models share a four year term with all the executive powers held by one individual.

This four year mandate – similar to central Government – will not only mean stronger local Government, but greater stability as well, removing an existing barrier to both good government and the effective delivery of the services people actually want.

Effective, Accountable and Responsive Local Government

In addition to the strengthening of leadership arrangements, we will secure effective, accountable and responsive local government across the country by:

- Giving overview and scrutiny committees of councils new powers to review the actions of key public bodies and require the Council executive and other public bodies to respond
- Requiring councils to publicise overview and scrutiny recommendations and the responses to those recommendations
- Providing a short window of opportunity and invitation for a small number of councils keen to seek unitary status (subject to criteria), and pushing for better joint working for all two-tier areas.
- Reforming the current Standards Board and implementing a more locally-based conduct regime. This will enable councillors to speak up on all local issues, including planning and licensing, and take them to Overview and Scrutiny.

Responsive Services and Empowered Communities

Proposals include:

Strengthening the ability of councillors to act as champions for their community via a new 'Community Call for Action'. This will give local people a more powerful voice to question decisions taken by their council, with councillors able to raise all issues from housing, to leisure facilities to waste management with a Council's Overview & Scrutiny Committee on residents' behalf. This will bring all council services in line with proposed Home Office legislation on community safety.

- Providing better and more timely information on the quality of local services, including annual publication of local authorities' performance against national outcome indicators and a set of indicators on citizen satisfaction. Additionally, we will encourage the Audit Commission to place greater emphasis on satisfaction indicators in its inspections.
- Reviewing the barriers to increasing community management and ownership of under-used local community assets so that these better serve local communities, with a new fund to support local authorities refurbishing assets for transfer to community groups.
- Making it easier to set up a tenant management organisation, giving tenants more control over their homes and neighbourhoods
- Devolving the right to set up parish councils to local government and giving communities in London the same right to establish parishes as elsewhere, provided this does not undermine community cohesion and there is clear local support. Quality Parish councils will have a general power of well-being, with considerable scope to act to promote or improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of their area.
- In future, councils will be able to determine local byelaws and enforce these through fixed penalty notices without agreement from central Government
- Revising the Best Value duty to secure the participation of citizens and communities in the delivery of local public services. It will be the responsibility of local public service providers to inform and consult their communities and, where appropriate, to devolve service delivery or management to them.
- Encouraging councils to develop local charters setting out service standards and priorities. Local authorities will also be encouraged to put in place standard procedures for dealing with petitions.
- Encouraging neighbourhood management teams to develop links with neighbourhood policing, so neighbourhood wardens, street wardens, Police Community Safety Officers and local police work as part of an integrated team to improve responsiveness to communities.
- In addition, we will encourage councils to provide councillors with small budgets to address local issues quickly.

Strong Cities; Strategic Regions

We want to maintain the renaissance in our cities, enabling them to compete on a global scale. But we believe the greater the powers being devolved, the greater the premium on clear, transparent and accountable leadership. In order to support our towns, cities and other areas to drive regional and national economic growth we will:

- Continue to work closely with those local authorities who have already come forward with proposals to help promote their further economic development - whether in city-regions or elsewhere, and recognising that there is no one size fits all model.

- Work with those local authorities interested in developing Multi-Area Agreements to facilitate greater cross boundary collaboration on key economic development issues in towns, cities and other areas. Promote city development companies and encourage Employment and Skills Boards to be formed in core cities.
- The Department for Transport will propose a package of reforms of Passenger Transport Authorities and Executives to strengthen leadership and enable a more coherent approach to transport in our biggest cities.
- Encourage stronger leadership models including directly elected executives and indirectly or directly elected mayors where such arrangements are supported locally.

Bring in a new performance framework for local government

Freeing up local authorities and partners to innovate whilst retaining accountability will support citizen empowerment and help secure better outcomes. Proposals include:

- Defining in CSR07 a clear set of Government priorities, with 1,200 national indicators slashed to a single set of around 200, measuring issues of nationwide importance including where minimum standards are essential e.g. climate change, social exclusion and anti-social behaviour.
- Agreeing through Local Area Agreements, a single set of around 35 specific improvement targets for each local area, plus the statutory targets for childcare and educational attainment.
- Shifting to risk-based assessment, enabling targeting of inspection where it can add most value.

Local Government as a Leader and Place-Shaper

Communities need strategic leadership to help bring together local partners to improve services and shape the places where we live. We will:

- Put in place a new framework for strategic leadership in local areas, bringing together local partners to focus on the needs of citizens and communities.
- Set out in statutory guidance our expectation that local authority leaders will play a leading role on Local Strategic Partnership boards - with an opportunity to agree the chair of the LSP board.
- **Strengthen local partnership** working by requiring the local authority and named local partners to cooperate with each other to agree the priorities in the Local Area Agreement. And once agreed, named local partners will be required to have regard to relevant targets for improvement.

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