

The Network Newsletter: tackling social exclusion in libraries, museums, archives and galleries

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The Network's Website is at www.seapn.org.uk and includes information on courses, good practice, specific socially excluded groups, as well as the newsletter archive.

Strong and prosperous communities: the Local Government White Paper

Introduction

The Local Government White Paper has just been published¹ and sets out the Government's blueprint for service provision – given its importance, we've produced a 'special issue' of the Newsletter.

Whether we work for or live within local authorities in the UK, these broad proposals are going to have a major impact on our lives, particularly via the calls for greater devolution of power to local communities and for greater involvement by everyone in local government.

Apart from the references to one-stop-shops in Gateshead and Warwickshire libraries [Vol 1, p28] and the inclusion of libraries in the list of services which require improvement ("Everyone wants to see improvements to their local schools, hospitals, libraries and parks." [Vol 1, p133]), there is no other mention of the role they play. Museums are mentioned only once, as one of the Government's successes ("Entry to museums is now free." [Vol 1, p15]), and archives are not mentioned at all. Indeed, culture altogether is a bit thin in here!

¹ Department for Communities and Local Government. *Strong and prosperous communities: the Local Government White Paper*. Vol 1: Cm 6939-I; Vol 2: Cm 6939-II. The Stationery Office, 2006. Volume 1:

http://www.communities.gov.uk/pub/98/StrongandProsperousCommunitiestheLocalGovernmentWhitePaperVol1_id1504098.pdf.

Volume 2:

http://www.communities.gov.uk/pub/99/StrongandProsperousCommunitiestheLocalGovernmentWhitePaperVol2_id1504099.pdf.

Nevertheless, there are some areas where museums, libraries and archives can have a very real impact, and we need to demonstrate that we can and do contribute to the development of “strong and prosperous communities”.

In future, the funding of public services is likely to depend on what they can deliver in respect of this and certain other agendas. It's important that we recognise that the long-talked-about shift from output to outcome funding is happening. For libraries, for example, this is likely to mean that visitor numbers and issue figures will be of declining interest to anyone outside the service – what will be measured are the impacts we make on people's lives, for example on their literacy, health, ability to find work and overall quality of life.

Volume 1

Chapter 1 is an introduction, and begins by looking at the need for good public services if we are to develop strong and prosperous communities, and the context in which the Government believes this will happen:

“But if we are to continue to improve, we now need to give local authorities and other local public services the freedom and powers to meet the needs of their communities and tackle complex cross-cutting issues like climate change, social exclusion, anti-social behaviour and improving standards for children in care.” [p15]

Secondly, this chapter stresses the importance of place and the role of partnerships.

Finally, it includes a section, “Putting it all together”, which states:

“This White Paper is all about creating better services and better places. It is a straightforward yet demanding ambition. It requires action on a number of fronts. It needs:

- public agencies to continue to reform how they work so they can offer individuals and communities the choice and quality of service that modern consumers expect and demand;
- local authorities to rise to the challenge of working in partnership; to provide strong and visible leadership; and a sense of vision and civic pride for their local area;
- local citizens and communities to be empowered to hold public services and their local authority to account and to be able to influence the services in their area; and
- local partners to work together to tackle difficult cross-cutting issues like climate change, social exclusion, and anti-social behaviour that hold back the sustainable economic development of an area.” [p22]

Chapter 2 is about “Responsive services and empowered communities” and introduces the key messages about giving individuals and groups a real say over services:

- “extending choice in local services by enabling people to have more control of the services they use on an individual basis;
- giving local people more say in running local services by reforming the best value regime to ensure that local authorities and other best value authorities inform, consult, involve and devolve to local citizens and communities, where appropriate;
- encouraging authorities to provide local people with prompt information on the quality and performance of local services so that they can judge how effective the public authorities for their area are;
- giving people a new right to an answer when they put forward suggestions or demand action from their local authorities by strengthening the role of local councillors through an expanded Community Call for Action and encouraging councils to provide them with small budgets to deal with local priorities;
- empowering citizens and communities by:
 - encouraging the expansion of neighbourhood management;
 - increasing the opportunities to take on the management and ownership of local assets and facilities;
 - simplifying and extending the scope of tenant management;
 - encouraging the use of local charters;
 - encouraging local authorities to deal with petitions systematically;
 - providing a new power of well-being for Quality Parish Councils;
- improving the development and co-ordination of support for citizens, community groups and local authorities.” [pp26-27]

Extending choice for individuals and families

This aim is based on the premise that “[t]he simplest and most direct way to increase people’s control is to give them more choice” [p27]. The examples cited are:

- Organising childcare
- Choice-based lettings schemes
- Choice in “the provision of social care, independent living, access to work, supported housing and community equipment services by expanding the scope of the existing direct payments schemes and piloting arrangements for individuals to have their own individual care budgets.” [p27]

Giving local people more say in running local services

This focuses on the role of:

- “innovative local authorities”, eg via participatory neighbourhood budgeting²; IT; one-stop-shops in libraries in Warwickshire and Gateshead; Shropshire’s Rural Pathfinder, etc.
- Government action to encourage citizen and community empowerment, eg the “Together We Can” campaign³; neighbourhood policing; work on healthy communities
- Securing participation – “The current duty of best value requires local authorities and other best value authorities to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of their functions, having regard to efficiency, effectiveness and economy. Consultation with local people also forms part of the existing duty. Our new proposals will build on this approach, so that authorities will be required to take steps, where appropriate, to ensure the participation of local citizens in their activities. In doing this authorities will need to give consideration to engaging with hard to reach groups, such as disabled persons. Authorities will be required to take steps to ensure participation by other key bodies, such as voluntary and community groups and local businesses.” [p31] This is going to involve:
 - Their issuing “one piece of best value statutory guidance on the new best value regime and commissioning. This will place citizens and users at the heart of service commissioning and will emphasise the need to involve the public in the design of local services, especially those who might otherwise be marginalised.” [p32]
 - Work to test different methods of involving/empowering local people
 - Encouraging “local authorities to have more systematic intelligence on local people’s needs and views and work with the Audit Commission to ensure that, as part of new audit arrangements, assessment of local authorities’ management and information systems gives due weight to citizen intelligence.” [p32]
 - The “re-launch [of] the Connecting with Communities resource ... by the end of 2006. This will contain professional advice and case studies ...” [p32]
 - Promoting “the spread of best practice by launching, in 2007, a new Beacons theme: *Empowering Citizens: Transforming Services*.” [p33]

Providing better and more timely information on the quality of local services

This section proposes a re-balancing of focus by local authorities:

“The current performance system for local authorities is focused too heavily on councils reporting to central government and not sufficiently on being accountable to local residents.” [p33]

² See: <http://www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk>.

³ See: www.togetherwecan.info.

Measures include:

- “supporting councils who are developing innovative new ways to communicate with their citizens, such as Portsmouth’s Report Card ... with funding from the Civic Pioneer Network’s problem solving fund;
- publishing annually local authorities’ performance against all their national outcome indicators, including a small set of indicators on citizen satisfaction and perspectives;
- working with local authorities to develop efficient ways to publish information faster and more frequently where this would help citizens and service providers make decisions which drive up performance;
- encouraging the Audit Commission, as part of its annual risk assessment and in inspections, to consider evidence such as citizen perspectives, including for the most vulnerable as well as a local authority’s compliance with the new duty to secure participation; and
- encouraging local authorities as the leaders of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) to provide local people with accessible and up-to-date information on progress against their Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) and Local Area Agreement (LAA).” [p33]

Listening to and acting on local concerns

“ ... when citizens come together to make proposals about how things could be done better, or to raise problems or issues that affect their quality of life, they need to be sure that they will be listened to. Many local authorities are good at listening to their citizens; sometimes however, people feel that their views are ignored.” [p34].

This section outlines proposals for strengthening the impact community groups and local councillors can have by introducing the Community Call for Action via which a councillor can raise and take action on issues of particular concern. In addition, “we will expect local authorities to consider what powers or budgets it would be appropriate to devolve to their councillors to help them in solving minor problems.” [p35]. However, care will need to be taken to ensure that the system is not abused by “vexatious complaints” [p36].

Empowering local people to manage neighbourhoods and own community facilities

This section proposes developing:

- Stronger and more widespread neighbourhood management
- Community management and ownership of assets (and there is a separate review of potential barriers to this, which is due to report early in 2007)
- “... more opportunities for tenants to get involved in the management of housing, community buildings and other neighbourhood environmental services.” [p40]
- More local charters for neighbourhoods, which are used to used to “set out the service standards and priorities for action which local people

expect from the local authority, and sometimes a wider group of partners, as well as any obligations that the community has taken on itself.” [p41]

- Creating more opportunities for parish and community councils.

Support for community groups to play a bigger role

“We will develop a support network which will deliver the following to community groups and their statutory partners:

- better support for community capacity building ...
- greater awareness of how to make a difference ...
- increased skills and confidence to engage ...
- more joined-up advice on taking on governance responsibilities: by implementing the cross-government Citizen Governance Project to enable more citizens, particularly those from under-represented groups, to become community leaders, and co-ordinating support for people in the most deprived areas to help set service priorities.” [pp44-45]

Chapter 3, “Effective, accountable and responsive local government”, proposes “a number of changes to help all councils develop their capacity and effectiveness” [p48], including:

- Finding ways of ensuring that there are more diverse and representative councillors
- Reaffirming the role of councillors as democratic champions. This also necessitates “high quality, committed council leaders” [p52] who can, for example, become the public face of the council, create and sustain local partnerships, and develop a long-term vision for the area together with the financial and investment strategies; and councillors who can, for example, become the recognised champions for their area, act as local community leaders, monitor local public service performance in their area.⁴
- Changing the rules for enacting byelaws
- Changing the models for council leadership, with, in future, there being three options:
 - A directly elected mayor with a 4-year term
 - A directly elected executive with a 4-year term
 - An indirectly elected leader with a 4-year term
- Strengthening the roles of overview and scrutiny
- Giving all local authorities the freedom to opt for whole council elections and enabling those holding such elections to move to single member wards
- Localising and simplifying the codes of conduct for local authorities

⁴ These roles for councillors and council leaders are taken from *Closer to people and places – a new vision for local government*. LGA, 2006 (see: <http://www.lga.gov.uk/Publication.asp?section=0&ccat=28&id=SXB7ED-A783A761>).

- Giving opportunities for improving governance in two-tier areas particularly – and this is developed further later – the rearrangement of roles of county and district councils, including opportunities to move to unitary local government and looking at new models of two-tier working.

Chapter 4 looks at the roles of cities and regions.

“... if we are to compete as a nation we must have cities that can hold their own on the global stage. Much of this will come down to the dynamism of the private sector. But research shows that the quality of government – national, regional and local – also matters a lot.” [p68]

“Strong cities make stronger regions and strong cities need strong regions.” [p68]

The Government is therefore going to look at:

- “... how they can best devolve powers and resources to regions and local authorities in cities and elsewhere to ensure there is clear accountability for decisions; stronger leadership and incentives to enable and support growth; reduced inequalities; and effective governance arrangements. The review will report for the Comprehensive Spending Review and will address
 - What existing sub-national delivery arrangements have contributed effectively to the Government’s regional economic performance and regeneration goals?
 - What is the most appropriate level to locate responsibility for intervention for the different policy areas which impact on economic development, regeneration and neighbourhood renewal?
 - What opportunities are there to reduce overlap and improve co-ordination between national, pan-regional, regional, sub-regional and local agencies, both in terms of strategy and delivery?
 - What are the institutional barriers currently hindering more effective co-ordination of policy-decisions and service delivery in the regions and how might these be overcome?
 - What other changes may be needed to improve the effectiveness of sub-national policy delivery?
- reform Passenger Transport Authorities and Executives, to enable a more coherent approach to transport to be taken in our major cities ...
- work closely with local authorities that are developing Multi-Area Agreements to facilitate greater cross-boundary collaboration, particularly on key economic development issues;
- consult on draft guidance to promote city development companies; and encourage stronger leadership models, including directly elected executives, indirectly or directly elected mayors, where such arrangements are supported locally ... [p69].

Chapter 5 looks at the role of “Local government as a strategic leader and place-shaper”.

This chapter emphasises the central role of the Local Strategic Partnership [LSP]:

“The main vehicle for developing a vision for transforming a place and for tackling hard cross-cutting social problems is the LSP. LSPs are not statutory bodies, but they bring together the public, voluntary, community and private sectors to coordinate the contribution that each can make to improving localities. Underpinning and supporting the LSP are various thematic partnerships such as the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership and children’s trust, which are responsible for tackling specific agendas and delivering service improvements.” [p96]

and looks at ways of strengthening this role (including greater involvement by councillors).

In addition, the Paper proposes strengthening the role of thematic partnerships, bearing in mind that:

“Our expectation is that LSPs should be the overarching strategic partnership, bringing together a manageable number of key thematic partnerships to deliver the priorities agreed in the LAA and Sustainable Community Strategy.” [p98]

In order to make this effective, it is proposed establishing a clear framework for agreeing priorities, which will include three new duties:

- “a new duty for the upper-tier local authority (in two-tier areas) or unitary authority to prepare a LAA in consultation with others ...
- a new duty for the local authority and named partners ... to cooperate with each other to agree the targets in the LAA; and
- a new duty for the local authority and named partners to have regard to relevant targets in the LAA – as set out by the relevant Secretary of State in directions.” [pp99-100]

The last of these new duties ties in a huge range of partners, including local authorities, the police, YOTs, PCTs, the NHS, the LSC, HSE, fire & rescue authorities, the Highways Agency, Natural England, etc.

The Paper also emphasises the importance of the Sustainable Community Strategy:

“The role of the Sustainable Community Strategy is to set out the strategic vision for a place. It provides a vehicle for considering and deciding how to address difficult cross-cutting issues such as the economic future of an area, social exclusion and climate change.” [p101]

Linked to these, the Paper sees the LAA as being “the delivery plan for the Sustainable Community Strategy focused on a relatively small number of priorities for improvement” [p102], with increased flexibility of funding.

This chapter then goes on to look at:

- Clarifying the role of district councils
- The relationship between London boroughs and the GLA when preparing Sustainable Community Strategies and LAAs
- Simplifying community consultation: “... we want the local authority and its partners to have the flexibility to draw up a much more comprehensive engagement strategy which captures the planned community engagement requirements of the individual partners and, where possible, combines activity.” [p108]
- Improving the integration of strategic planning procedures
- Emphasising the importance of strategic commissioning.

Chapter 6 introduces a new performance framework.

“Our aim ... is to reduce radically the number of nationally-required local targets, performance indicators and reporting and to replace these with new opportunities for citizens to hold their local providers to account for the quality of services. This will place greater responsibility on local authorities – on their own and in partnership – to drive improvements in outcomes in their areas and be responsive and accountable to their citizens.” [p114]

This new performance framework will:

- “strengthen accountability to citizens and communities through increasing choice, encouraging authorities to provide citizens and communities with timely information on services, introducing more effective means of redress when things go wrong and increasing opportunities for communities to run local services and manage local facilities;
- give greater responsibility to local authorities and their partners for securing improvements in services ...
- provide a better balance between national and local priorities, with a drastic reduction in the number of national performance indicators and a revised Local Area Agreement (LAA) process through which central Government and local partners will agree and manage a limited number of improvement targets for each local area;
- improve the arrangements for external assessment and inspection so that they are better co-ordinated between the various inspectorates and related more proportionately to risk by reforming the current performance assessment arrangements for local government, putting in place the following key elements:
 - an annual risk assessment which identifies the key risks to outcomes or delivery for each area

- an annual scored Use of Resources judgement for local public sector bodies, drawn from the annual audit;
- an annual scored Direction of Travel judgement which assesses the effectiveness of each local authority in driving continuous improvement;
- inspection activity by relevant inspectorates targeted primarily on the basis of the risk assessment;
- streamline the process for providing improvement support and intervention for authorities struggling to deliver agreed outcomes for local people, with the response tailored to the nature and severity of the problem.” [pp114-115]

Chapter 7 looks at “Efficiency – transforming local services”. Key proposals include:

- “requiring ambitious efficiency gains to be achieved by local authorities over the next few years as part of the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR07), necessitating a more radical and ambitious value for money programme, with effective and direct challenge for poorly performing or coasting services;
- securing more collaboration between local authorities and across all public bodies, where this improves effectiveness and efficiency, and ensuring that administrative boundaries do not act as a barrier to service transformation and efficiency;
- driving a more extensive use of business process improvement techniques, including new technology, to transform service delivery and focus services around the needs and preferences of users;
- ensuring greater contestability through the use of fair and open competition in local government services markets;
- providing a foundation of stable finance, which will enable authorities to plan better, publish three-year council tax projections and provide more stable funding for partners in the third sector; and
- providing expert support to councils and their partners to meet their efficiency challenges, through a streamlined and co-ordinated approach to building capacity.” [p135]

Chapter 8 looks at community cohesion.

The proposals in this chapter “focus on how we will achieve a step change in activities to build cohesion by building on existing good practice and some guiding principles drawn from it. And we will support local government in tackling extremism.” [p152]

In order to “achieve a step change in the calibre and impact of cohesion strategies” [p152], the paper proposes that the Government will:

- “work with local authorities and their partners to identify those places where cohesion should be a local priority reflected in improvement targets in Local Area Agreements (LAAs) and work with them on how they should address local challenges;

- provide support and challenge when areas are facing difficulties in line with the approach to improvement, support and intervention described in chapter six;
- emphasise the importance of promoting community cohesion through Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and Sustainable Community Strategies;
- share best practice effectively between local authorities who have long standing experiences of immigration and those for whom the impact is comparatively recent;
- support the establishment of forums on extremism in parts of the country where it is necessary. These will be strategic groups attended by key local partners, such as police and third sector organisations, acting as a hub for local projects aimed at tackling extremist activities;
- encourage the Commission on Integration and Cohesion to produce more detailed plans on how to deliver a step change in promoting cohesion – based on the framework outlined in this chapter.” [pp152-153]

The Paper looks at the roles of central and local government; sets out the eight guiding principles for success [see below]; and makes the promotion of community cohesion and the tackling and preventing of extremism “core business”.

These eight principles are:

- Strong leadership and engagement
- Developing shared values
- Conflict resolution projects and contingency planning
- Good information is vital
- Visible work to tackle inequalities provides a strong foundation for cohesion
- Involving young people is essential and they need to be engaged in a way that will attract them.
- Interfaith work can also keep channels of communication open
- Partners such as local third sector organisations can play a huge part in building cohesion.

Finally, **Chapter 9** summarises “Steps towards implementation”. These include changes to legislation, reviews and other pieces of work. The changes in legislation will:

- “revise the duty on best value authorities (except police authorities) to require them to secure the participation of local people;
- deregulate and simplify best value by removing the requirements on English best value authorities to prepare an annual Best Value Performance Plan and conduct Best Value Reviews;
- exempt parishes from best value;

- delete provisions which enable the Secretary of State to specify, by order, best value performance indicators and best value performance standards, so that they no longer apply to England;
- enable councillors acting as advocates for their communities to initiate a Community Call for Action to resolve local issues of concern;
- devolve the power to create new parishes from the Secretary of State and the Electoral Commission to district and unitary authorities and allow parishes to adopt alternative names;
- allow communities in London the option to form parishes and have a parish council, as exists elsewhere;
- extend the well-being power to Quality Parish Councils;
- amend the Right to Manage regulations;
- improve the responsiveness of the Local Government Ombudsman and clarify the Ombudsman's role." [pp167-168]

Volume 2

The second volume of the White Paper takes seven cutting themes and looks at how the Paper will address these. The themes are:

- Community safety
- Health and well-being
- Vulnerable people
- Children, young people and families
- Economic development, housing and planning
- Climate change
- The third sector.

For each, it includes:

- "Our ambition"
- The challenge
- How the White Paper will meet the challenge.

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