

Strong and prosperous communities –
The Local Government White Paper
Final implementation plan





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Context

1. *Strong and Prosperous Communities – The Local Government White Paper*¹ was published in October 2006. The white paper set out the Government's commitment to empowering citizens and communities and to public sector reform. Its principal aims were to enable effective local services and to create better places, through new relationships and better governance, by:
 - promoting more responsive services and empowered communities
 - advocating a stronger role for local authorities as community leaders
 - promoting stronger and more stable local authority leadership
 - supporting councillors in their role as democratic champions
 - fundamentally rebalancing the central-local relationship
 - promoting community cohesion; and
 - developing the economic prosperity of our towns, cities and regions
2. This is the third implementation plan for the Local Government white paper. The first was published in January 2007, with further progress reported on 1 November 2007, a year after publication of the white paper. This version provides a final update on progress, and sets out timescales for the remaining stages of implementation.
3. A key part of the Government's continuing strategy for local government is empowering citizens to help them acquire the confidence, skills and opportunity to control and influence their local services. The white paper *Communities in Control: real people, real power*, published on 9 July 2008, aims to generate a more vibrant local democracy and give more control to local communities over decisions and services. We plan to publish an Implementation Plan for *Communities in Control* in spring 2009.
4. The previous Local Government white paper implementation plans reported on five workstreams:
 - Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007
 - performance
 - governance and empowerment
 - cities and regions
 - community cohesion
5. The specific commitments in the Local Government white paper under the first and final two workstreams have now been met. Therefore this update focuses on the performance and governance and empowerment workstreams.

¹ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/strongprosperous>

Timing

6. As before, the remaining timelines in this plan are indicative – especially those dependent on implementation by subordinate legislation under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

Performance

Headlines

Key achievements since November 2007 include:

- new local performance framework core narrative and implementation plan published (Nov 07) and updated summary document published in October 2008
- published set of 12 sectoral narratives on the new local performance framework (Dec 07–Apr 08)
- first release of Data Interchange Hub went live (Apr 08)
- final *Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities* guidance (including *Sustainable Communities* guidance) published (July 08)
- a single set of 198 national indicators was agreed as part of the CSR in October 2007, now reduced to 188
- all 150 local area agreements (LAAs) signed off and national publicity launch (Jun 08)
- local priorities public-facing website launched, giving details of all 150 LAAs (Jun 08)
- total of ten multi-area agreements (MAAs) signed off (July & Dec 08)
- second joint inspectorate consultation on comprehensive area assessment (CAA) (Aug–Oct 08)
- publication of national improvement and efficiency strategy (Dec 07)
- national improvement and efficiency strategy prospectus launched (Mar 08)
- funding confirmed and strategies signed-off for regional improvement and efficiency partnerships (Mar 08)
- publication of regulatory framework for delivery of CAA (Feb 09)
- final Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) results published (Mar 09)

National indicator set

7. Government announced, as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR07) in October 2007, a single set of national priorities for local authorities working alone or in partnership, to be measured through a set of **188² national performance indicators**. These took effect from April 2008, enabling LAAs to be negotiated on the basis of the new indicators by June

² Originally 198, but following the removal of 3 indicators by the Home Office and a further 7 by the Department for Children, Schools and Families the figure now stands at 188

2008. Updated definitions for the indicators were recently published on the Communities and Local Government website³.

New local performance framework

8. The new local performance framework applies to local authorities and their service-delivery partners (for example the police, Jobcentre Plus and NHS Trusts). It brings together national performance indicators, local area agreements and comprehensive area assessment to provide a focus for improving services and quality of life for local people. We have published a **core narrative** (which was updated in October 2008) **and implementation plan**⁴ to explain how the framework operates and what benefits it will bring.
9. We have been working with key Departments and stakeholders to clarify how the new **single performance framework** for local government and its partners will align, co-ordinating with frameworks for other sectors. A series of 12 **sectoral narratives** explaining the new performance framework from the perspective of different local stakeholders have also been published⁵. We have also published **integrated guidance** *Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities*⁶ relating to the new statutory framework for local area agreements, joint strategic needs assessments, the Sustainable Communities Act 2007 and the new simplified best value regime as well as updating guidance on the preparation of sustainable community strategies.

Local area agreements and local strategic partnerships

10. The new style **local area agreements (LAAs)** are at the heart of the new local performance framework. Local authorities and other local service providers have come together with national government to develop agreements for each of England's 150 top-tier local authority areas. Each LAA contains up to 35 priorities, selected from the national indicator set and agreed with Government, in addition to which local partners may agree a number of local targets. We successfully signed off all 150 LAAs on 30 June 2008 and these were formally announced through a national media campaign. Details of each LAA are available on our public-facing website www.localpriorities.communities.gov.uk.
11. As well as placing LAAs on a statutory footing, the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 also placed a duty on all upper tier authorities to prepare an LAA, and a **duty on named partners to co-operate** in agreeing LAAs targets and to have regard to those targets in their work.

³ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/updatednidefinitions>

⁴ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/localperformanceframework>

⁵ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/performanceframeworkpartnerships/>

⁶ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/strongsafeprosperous>

12. The principles of **multi-area agreements** (MAAs) were published as part of the *Review of Sub-National Economic Development and Regeneration* (SNR). We are working closely with local authorities that are developing MAAs to facilitate greater cross-boundary collaboration, and to improve economic prosperity in their local areas. The first seven MAAs were signed off on 14 July 2008 and a further three were signed on 12 January 2009. Further details on MAAs, including summaries of the agreements are available on the Communities and Local Government website.⁷

Comprehensive area assessment (CAA)

13. The Audit Commission have been leading the work with key public service inspectorates to develop the new **comprehensive area assessment** (CAA). From April 2009, CAA will replace the comprehensive performance assessment and most other rolling programmes of inspection for local authorities. CAA will monitor progress against the national indicator set, as well as the targets set out in LAAs. They will hold service providers accountable to local people and check on whether services are of a high standard and represent value for money.
14. The second of two Audit Commission consultation exercises, focusing on the detailed methodology for CAA, ended on 20 October 2008. This work has also been informed by a series of action learning pilots in four local areas. The Inspectorates published their regulatory framework for the delivery of CAA on 10 February.⁸
15. The last CPA results were published on 5 March 2009,⁹ with the first CAA reports expected in the autumn.

Improvement and efficiency

16. In December 2007 the *National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy* was published. It set out how central and local government would work together to develop and implement a sector-led approach to improvement support and intervention at the local level. The strategy highlighted the key role that innovation and efficiency has to play in driving improvement in service delivery. A prospectus, together with a set of regional improvement and efficiency strategies, were published in March 2008 which set out further details of how the strategy would be implemented.
17. In 2008 the Department commissioned a report to recommend ways of strengthening the support for councils in respect of procurement efficiency. Bill Roots, former chief executive of Westminster City Council, undertook the review and his report was published in February 2009.¹⁰ A key

⁷ <https://internetstg.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/performanceframeworkpartnerships/multiareaagreements/?version=5>

⁸ www.audit-commission.gov.uk/caa/framework.asp

⁹ <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/reports>

¹⁰ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/rootsreview>

recommendation of the report is the strengthening of the role for regional improvement and efficiency partnerships. The Department is working with the local government sector on developing a funded implementation plan, which will be announced in the Budget as part of the operational efficiency programme.

Planned timetable for performance

2009

End March	LAA refresh completed
April 2009	Full implementation of the new performance framework, including CAA, new inspection methodologies and revised inspection protocol arrangements, plus the full suite of national performance indicators
April 2009	New duty on Best Value authorities to involve local people comes into force
Autumn	First CAA results published.

Governance and Empowerment

Headlines

Key achievements since November 2007 include:

- structural change orders made for nine new unitary councils in seven areas (Feb–Mar 08)
- new parish governance arrangements introduced (Feb 08)
- new devolved conduct regime for local Standards Committees introduced (May 08)
- sponsorship of 34 participatory budgeting pilots (ongoing)
- consultation on Councillor Call for Action provisions (Dec–Mar 08)
- the empowerment white paper, *Communities in Control: real people, real power* published (Jul 08).
- Councillors Commission report issued (Dec 07) and response published alongside the white paper *Communities in Control* (Jul 08)
- *Improving Local Accountability* consultation exercise (Aug–Oct 08)
- published national strategy on participatory budgeting (Sept 08)
- consultation on revision to byelaws (Aug–Oct 08)
- consultation on code of conduct for members and employees (Oct 08)
- order laid providing new sanctions for Adjudication Panel (Nov 08)
- consultation on revised publicity code for local authorities (Dec 08)
- well-being powers extended to certain parish councils (Dec 08)

Restructuring

18. In order to deliver increased efficiency and better outcomes for citizens, in particular through stronger and more effective accountability and local leadership, greater opportunities for community engagement, and increased value for money on public services, councils in two-tier areas were invited to submit proposals for **unitary status**, or to become two-tier **pathfinders**.
19. The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 provides for the implementation of such unitary proposals. Orders for the creation of the following unitary councils have been made:
 - Bedford Borough Council
 - Central Bedfordshire Council
 - Cheshire East Council

- Cheshire West and Chester Council
- Cornwall Council
- County Durham Council
- Northumberland Council
- Shropshire Council
- Wiltshire Council

These new unitary councils will be up and running from 1 April 2009.

20. In addition, Ministers have referred to the Boundary Committee proposals for unitary status received from Exeter, Ipswich and Norwich. The Committee is now due to give its advice to the Secretary of State by the 15 July 2009. Following receipt of that advice, and a four-week period during which representations can be made to Government, the Secretary of State can decide:
- to implement by Order, with or without modifications, any alternative proposal made by the Committee
 - to implement the original proposals from Norwich City Council, Exeter City Council and Ipswich City Council (also with or without modification); or
 - take no further action
21. Regulations providing for the detailed arrangements around structural change such as asset and staff transfer have been made and further provision will be made before 1 April 2009.
22. All continuing two-tier councils need to work to achieve increased efficiency and better outcomes for citizens through measures including closer and more integrated service delivery models and greater shared back office functions. Four regions are acting as **pathfinders** – Buckinghamshire, Dorset, Hertfordshire and Lincolnshire. Their remit is to pioneer new and innovative ways of working and deliver better services and, following a conference last September, the IDeA continues to highlight their work.
23. Government is working with key partners, such as the LGA and Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships, to determine a programme of work for a range of service transformation, improvement and efficiency projects, and to promote innovation and dissemination of good practice. We expect pathfinder authorities to be well-placed as potential partners in such projects.

Governance framework

24. The new strengthened **leadership models** introduced in the 2007 Act provided councils with a choice between a directly elected mayor and an indirectly elected leader with a four year term. Legislation requires these

new models to be implemented in phases from May 2009 for county councils, 2010 for metropolitan districts and London borough councils and 2011 for district councils. The 2007 Act also enables councils to change governance models (either moving to a mayoral model or from such a model to the indirectly elected leader model) following consultation with their communities but without the need for a referendum. However, where a model has been adopted following a referendum it can be changed only after a further referendum.

25. Electoral arrangements have also been simplified by devolving the power to local authorities to change their scheme of elections without the Secretary of State's involvement. Local authorities can also now make requests to the Electoral Commission for a review which will consider whether **single member wards** should be implemented in their area.
26. The new, enhanced **overview and scrutiny committee** powers (enabling them to review the actions of key local public service providers operating in their area and to call for evidence) will be commenced from April 2009. A consultation was issued on 7 August 2008¹¹ on the proposed framework within which these new powers will operate. The intention is that the regulations setting this framework will be made over the next few months.
27. Secondary legislation under the 2007 Act will also give local authorities the power to deal with local problems both by making certain **byelaws** and by enforcing them by fixed penalty notices without confirmation from the Secretary of State. A consultation exercise was issued in August 2008¹² and the intention is for these provisions to be in place by summer 2009.
28. Reform to the regime governing the **conduct of local authority members** continues. Devolved arrangements for Standards Committees are now in place, with further regulations on the conduct regime, including the ability of local authorities to set up joint standards committees, to follow by June 2009.

Review of barriers and incentives for serving on councils

29. The **Commission on Local Councillors** published its report on 10 December 2007 and the Government published its response on 9 July 2008. To take this forward, we will reduce barriers and increase incentives to people standing and serving as councillors through legislative changes and working with the local government sector through the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Women's Councillors Taskforce, the Leadership Centre and the Take Part programme.
30. The duty to promote democracy is the central theme of the Government response, and creates the framework for a change in emphasis and culture that we believe will lead to a broader range of people standing for office.

¹¹ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/localaccountability>

¹² <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/byelaws>

This has been included in the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill which begins Lords report stage in Parliament on 17 March 2009.

Community empowerment

31. The **community governance** arrangements in the 2007 Act which included devolving to principal authorities the powers to take decisions on the creation of new parishes or alterations to existing parishes; new powers to set up parishes in London; and for parish councils to be known by alternatives such as 'community', 'neighbourhood' or 'village' councils were implemented in February 2008.
32. Provisions in the 2007 Act also extend the power to **promote well-being to parish and town councils** which meet conditions set out in secondary legislation which came into force at the end of December 2008, and guidance published in February 2009.¹³
33. The power enabling parish councils to appoint councillors (in addition to the normal quota of elected and co-opted councillors) is linked with requirements for the chairman and vice-chairman of a parish council to be elected from among the elected councillors and for there to be a minimum of five elected members on a parish council. The aim of these amendments is to provide a clearer distinction between elected members of the council and those that are either co-opted or appointed.
34. The intention is to implement all of these amendments together, however, the amendments in relation to elected member requirements have raised some issues and consideration is currently being given to representations received. Therefore, a future update on the implementation of these arrangements will be included in the first Communities Action Plan timetable.
35. The 2007 Act extends **Councillor Calls for Action** to all local government services, to enable more citizens to get their community concerns addressed through their councillors. On 3 December 2008 an order was laid to commence Councillor Call for Action provisions for local government matters, bringing them into force from 1 April 2009. Following consultation, on 30 December an order was laid setting out matters which are excluded from the scope of Councillor Call for Action. In addition we have supported the IDeA, in partnership with the Centre for Public Scrutiny, to produce a sector-led guide to Councillor Call for Action which was published on 13 February 2009.¹⁴ The Home Office will also bring into force their provisions for crime and disorder overview and scrutiny committees and Councillor Call for Action in April 09.
36. Following the publication of the Quirk review into the **community management and ownership of public assets**, and the Government

¹³ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/1149100>

¹⁴ <http://www.cfps.org.uk/what-we-do/publications/cfps-general/?id=92>

response *Opening the Transfer Window*¹⁵ in May 2007, we are implementing the recommendations in full in partnership with other government departments, local government and community partners. *Opening the Transfer Window* set out the first phase of implementation which included support for partnerships in 20 demonstration areas, development of a risk management guide (published in July 2008), development of new local authority asset management guidance (to be published in 2009) and the allocation of £30m in refurbishment grants from the Office of the Third Sector to support local authority asset transfers. Subsequently, ministers have agreed to extend the demonstration programme to a further 90 areas by 2011, of which 30 have been supported in 2008–09, and to fund the establishment of an independent Asset Transfer Unit.¹⁶ The unit, which opened for business in January 2009, is hosted by the Development Trusts Association, and is a focus for the provision of information, advice, research, good practice guidance and awareness raising on asset transfer across England.

37. We are working with local government and community organisations to identify and promote good practice in local charters, neighbourhood planning and citizenship learning and improve the use of community development resources. This will be done through practitioners' networks. Thirty-four **participatory budgeting** pilots have been announced so far with more being planned in partnership with local government. In September 2008 we published a National Strategy on Participatory Budgeting¹⁷.

¹⁵ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/openingtransfer>

¹⁶ <http://www.atu.org.uk>

¹⁷ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/participatorybudgetingstrategy>

Planned timetable for restructuring, the governance framework, and community empowerment

2009

Feb–Mar	Remaining regulations made setting up arrangements for transition to unitary structures in April 2009
April	Consultation on powers to enable joint standards committees and new monitoring and intervention powers for the Standards Board Councillor Call for Action powers introduced New overview and scrutiny powers commenced
1 April	Nine new unitary councils established
from May	New leadership models and electoral arrangements introduced in phases until 2011
Summer	New bye-law powers introduced
June	Implement revised model Code of Conduct Implement powers enabling joint standards committees and new monitoring and intervention powers for the Standards Board
July	Boundary Committee provides advice on unitary proposals for Norwich, Ipswich and Exeter

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