



# 'Neighbourhood Governance and Community Engagement'

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North West Futures Conference

# What's Government trying to achieve?

- Public service reform and improvement
- Citizen and community empowerment and sense of agency

# The rise of 'Localism' and the national agenda

- “Top-down” approaches haven’t worked
- Need to be less centrally-driven, more locally-driven
- This means:
  - Devolution
  - More citizen involvement, engagement, empowerment
  - More responsive & joined-up services
  - More local accountability

# What does this mean at the local level?

- Strategic level:
  - Greater partnership working
  - Aligning resources where possible
  - More local accountability
  - LAAs, LSPs etc
- Local level (below Town Hall)
  - Engaging citizens better
  - Making decisions more locally
  - Devolving decisions and budgets
  - Developing role of backbenchers
  - New structures

# The neighbourhoods agenda

- Is about below the Town Hall
- But also below the 'area level'
- Different area models emerging
  - 'Area Committees' (West Sussex)
  - 'Mini LSPs' (Birmingham; Wakefield)
  - 'Mini LAAs' in future?

# How does this differ from area working?

- Area arrangements may be necessary pre-conditions for neighbourhoods
- There is a spectrum of possible arrangements
- However, broadly it could go further:
  - About citizen empowerment as well as engagement
  - Does have implications for cllrs, but is also about additional forms of empowerment and representation
  - Can be ‘bottom up’ as well as ‘top down’
  - Can look like parishes but also other models
  - Can be about direct ownership or control of assets, services
  - Different arrangements for different areas and different aims

# Neighbourhoods Agenda

- ‘Why Neighbourhoods Matter’, Jan 05
- Papers next year (+ White Paper?)
- Proposals:
  - Ward councillors
  - Contracts/triggers
  - NIDS
  - Parishes
  - Community ownership/management

# Different elements

- **Explicit:**
  - new structures
  - developing a new approach and openness to ideas from below
- **Implicit:**
  - also about facilitating new contacts at local level – outside ‘governance’ concerns

# What will it mean for councils?

- Government will expect:
  - Councils to devolve further
    - Drivers: CPA / legislation
  - Demonstrate engagement around key issues
  - Hold good local knowledge and data (justifying the Community Leadership role)
  - Involve other partners
  - Join up local services

# Locally councils will have to:

- Work out own models – what to devolve, where
- Learn from and develop current neighbourhood initiatives – NDCs, NRF, TMOs etc
- Be open to new approaches from below
- Facilitate, develop, intervene, mediate
- Join up the whole governance system – ‘line of sight’
- Think about implications for the councils’ own systems and structures

# Challenges

- Making system coherent – mini LAAs?
- Joining up with other agencies – boundaries, funding, accountability
- Building capacity of community, councillors, officers
- Achieving efficiency
- Keeping improvement on track
- Creating new performance management arrangements
- Balancing with cohesion, equity and risk

# What might Government still need to do?

- Devolve!
- To councils and their partners
- Re-think inspection and performance
- Develop LAAs
- Join up strategic community leadership with neighbourhood governance
- Increase local government's accountability for other public services?
- Think again on unitary councils?
- *Are local government's responsibilities (accountabilities) clear enough for this to work?*

# Overall

- A challenging agenda
- But one which councils should embrace
- Enhances Community Leadership
- And brings strength to devolution arguments
- Interesting times – new Minister, Lyons Inquiry, developing agenda



The New Local Government Network is an independent think tank that seeks to transform public services, revitalise local political leadership and empower local communities.

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“The virtual home of New Localism”, The Times, March 2004