



# Briefing

## **Community Empowerment White Paper - Communities in Control: Real people, real power**

January 2009

Understanding and supporting  
women and their organisations

This document is available in other formats. Contact the Women's Resource Centre on 020 7324 3030 or [info@wrc.org.uk](mailto:info@wrc.org.uk)

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## Introduction

Communities and Local Government (CLG) published their community empowerment white paper *Communities in Control: real people, real power*<sup>1</sup> on 9<sup>th</sup> July 2008. This sets out how the government intends to pass “more and more political power to more and more people”<sup>2</sup> and is about reviving and reinvigorating citizen engagement and local democracy.

The purpose of this briefing is to summarise the white paper to highlight the aspects which may be the most relevant and will have the most impact on the third sector and specifically women’s voluntary and community sector organisations (VCOs). This briefing aims to:

- Set the policy context
- Summarise the key points from the white paper
- Describe issues of relevance and implications to women’s voluntary and community sector organisations
- Outline actions which can be taken

The information presented is based on briefings from other organisations and other consultation documents WRC has responded to,<sup>3</sup> as well as the white paper itself.

## Background

The background of the Community Empowerment White Paper is relatively complicated and overlaps with work by the Ministry of Justice on reforming the way Britain is governed.

The main drivers for the policy are:

- the declining turnout at both national and local elections;
- people locally not feeling that they have an adequate say in running local services;
- councillors being viewed as unrepresentative.

The White Paper links to various papers and consultations that have been produced around these issues. You can find WRC responses to many of these consultations at [www.wrc.org.uk](http://www.wrc.org.uk)

- Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2006.<sup>4</sup>
- Ministry of Justice’s *Governance of Britain* green paper in 2007.<sup>5</sup>
- CLG discussion paper *Unlocking the Talents of our Communities* March 2008.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/communitiesincontrol>

<sup>2</sup> P2

<sup>3</sup> Links to these documents can be found on our website [http://www.wrc.org.uk/resources/briefings\\_and\\_consultations/current\\_briefings.aspx](http://www.wrc.org.uk/resources/briefings_and_consultations/current_briefings.aspx) and at the end of this briefing

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsLegislation/DH\\_076445](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsLegislation/DH_076445)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/governanceofbritain.htm>

- Ministry of Justice discussion paper *A National Framework for Greater Citizen Engagement* which was published on the same day as the community empowerment white paper.<sup>7</sup>
- *Creating strong, safe and prosperous communities* July 2008.<sup>8</sup> This is now statutory guidance for local authorities, outlining many of key mechanism contained in this white paper, including Local Strategic Partnerships, Sustainable Community Strategies, the new duty to involve, Local Area Agreements, and commissioning.
- CLG *Principles of Representation* August 2008.<sup>9</sup> This is good practice for the third sector on the key principles involved in representing the VCS at local level, developed in conjunction with the third sector, including WRC.
- *Transforming Places, Changing Lives: A Framework for Regeneration* October 2008.<sup>10</sup>

The White Paper wants to promote “a vibrant participatory democracy”<sup>11</sup> by encouraging unelected representatives to have a voice, often supported by VCS organisations, in order to strengthen representative (elected) democracy.

Also of relevance to the white paper is the work CLG began in June 2007 to develop a Third Sector Strategy, describing the way they will work with the voluntary and community sector (VCS) and other third sector organisations. Previous announcements from the Department relating to this included:

- The establishment of a £6.4million Strategic Partners Grant to fund strategic third sector partners, subsequently suspended.
- The establishment of a £70million community anchors programme to support community-led organisations that acted as a hub for community activity in their neighbourhood.
- Enhancing and revitalising the Third Sector Partnership Board, which is the forum CLG will use to strategically consult with the third sector.

## Summary of white paper main proposals

### General comments

- Although the White Paper states that “we particularly value the role of the third sector in social and democratic renewal”,<sup>12</sup> there is a clear focus on individuals and its proposals concentrate on community-led neighbourhood organisations.
- There is no mention of community empowerment networks (CENs), nor of the VCS infrastructure required to facilitate VCS representation at a borough or regional level, and equalities groups are also not mentioned. However,

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/unlockingtalent>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/citizen-engagement.htm>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/strongsafeprosperous>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/principleofrepresentation>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/citiesandregions/transformingplaces>

<sup>11</sup> P1

<sup>12</sup> P14

despite the current emphasis on empowerment and community voice, many CENs are struggling to survive or have already ceased to operate. Urban Forum surveyed 79 CENs in 2008 and found that since the introduction of the new LAA funding, 18% of CENs had lost their funding, and 22% had lost part of their funding<sup>13</sup>.

- There is a lack of acknowledgement of how community participation and engagement is gendered.
- The *Communities in Control Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)*<sup>14</sup> states that “there are no notable gender differences in relation to subjective empowerment...Moreover, men and women seem to participate at similar rates in civic and political life.”<sup>15</sup> This statement overlooks important gender differences which impact on women’s access to decision making and influencing.<sup>16</sup> Research sponsored by CLG highlights the many factors involved in supporting or hindering women to get involved in decision making at local level, as well as what is needed for organisations to be able to take up gender equality in meaningful ways.<sup>17</sup>
- The White Paper takes a gender neutral approach and women’s under representation in local government is the only form of discrimination against women that is highlighted. Women and women’s organisations are spectacularly under-represented on LSPs, with only 1.8% of VCS representatives on LSPs being women’s organisations, despite the fact that we make up 7% of the VCS.<sup>18</sup>
- The White Paper notes that “less than one per cent of local councillors are black, asian and minority ethnic women....”<sup>19</sup> We strongly encourage the support to BME women to be involved in local decision making and hope that their different needs would also be taken into account.
- The White Paper recognises the importance of third sector organisations working together and that “inclusive participative structures for third sector organisations are important in ensuring that the sector has a consistent, effective and accountable voice in local decision-making.”<sup>20</sup> We would argue that this is even more important for women's organisations as a lack of visibility and funding, and the movement towards commissioning and procurement has exacerbated the need for women's organisations to work in partnership and has also led to many organisations merging due to financial constraints. Therefore this has become a necessity rather than a choice.

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<sup>13</sup> [www.urbanforum.org.uk/pdf\\_files/community%20empowerment%20network%20cen%20research%20report%202008%2004%20.pdf](http://www.urbanforum.org.uk/pdf_files/community%20empowerment%20network%20cen%20research%20report%202008%2004%20.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/equalityimpactassessment>

<sup>15</sup> P10

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/ukpoverty/downloads/notseennoheard.pdf> and [http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm\\_docs/2008/w/womenlsp.pdf](http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm_docs/2008/w/womenlsp.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> [http://www.changesuk.net/final\\_report\\_closing\\_the\\_gap.pdf](http://www.changesuk.net/final_report_closing_the_gap.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Gudnadottir, Elin, et al. (2007). *Where are the women in LSPs?: Women’s representation in Local Strategic Partnerships*. Urban Forum, Oxfam and Women’s Resource Centre. London.

<sup>19</sup> P107

<sup>20</sup> P73

## **Main proposals in the white paper which would effect women's voluntary and community organisations**

- The Community Empowerment White Paper sets out the key elements of the new relationship between central and local government and between local government and the people.

### **New duties**

The new duties include: the duty to promote democracy, which requires local authorities to encourage local people to get involved in politics (although it is not clear if this will be restricted to encouraging participation in elections or wider local involvement, or how it will be monitored); a duty to respond to petitions (see page 12); and the duty to involve.

### **The duty to involve<sup>21</sup>**

From April 2009, local authorities have to make sure they inform, involve and engage with local communities properly, under the new 'Duty to Involve'. This includes ensuring they engage 'representatives of local persons', including the VCS and marginalised, vulnerable people or 'hard to reach' local people. Equalities legislation (e.g., the Gender duty, etc) will apply to the duty to involve.

The duty is being extended to additional agencies and bodies across England including Police Authorities, Regional Development Agencies, Youth Offending Teams, The Homes and Communities Agency, JobCentre Plus, The Environment Agency, Probation Trusts and other providers of probation services.<sup>22</sup> NHS bodies are also under a comparable duty to involve.

Women's organisations work with some of the most marginalised communities of women, and can assert their right to be involved in community engagement.

### ***What you can do***

- Talk to your local council about how they are going to implement the duty to involve, and how they will meet their obligations under the gender equality duty to make sure women are appropriately consulted and engaged.
- Ensure your organisation is on the 'radar' of appropriate departments within the council and other public bodies, such as Primary Care Trusts.
- Be prepared with good information and evidence about local women's needs as this may enable you to have more constructive conversations with others who are unaware of how and what issues are having particular impacts on women.
- You could ask the consulting body to go beyond the usual 'consultation event' format and come out and meet with your organisation (and service users if appropriate) to get feedback on a particular policy issue, especially if you do not have a lot of capacity to engage with the many policy consultations that take place (reading the consultation document, travelling to an event etc).

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<sup>21</sup> Chapter 1, P16 and P28

<sup>22</sup> Chapter 1, P28

- Keep in touch with local infrastructure organisations that often produce briefings on policy consultation issues which summarise the key issues, or provide information in other ways.

### **Local Strategic Partnerships<sup>23</sup>**

Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) are partnerships between statutory agencies, such as the local authority, health and the police and other organisations such as local businesses and the voluntary sector. They are the key decision making body in an area and decide on local priorities and funding.

The White Paper states that: “Third sector organisations are full and equal partners in LSPs.” However, WRC has raised numerous concerns about the ability of women’s organisations to fully and equally participate in LSPs.

#### **Key issues**

- In terms of the representation of VCOs on LSPs, across England only 1.8% of VCS representatives are women’s organisations (despite comprising 7% of the voluntary sector)<sup>24</sup>.
- There are numerous barriers facing women’s organisations that prevent them getting involved in their LSP:
  - not being listened to;
  - the huge amount of time commitment to participate;
  - not having the issues they work with taken on board or even understood;
  - and no understanding on the board of why a gendered analysis is important to ensure all needs are met.
- There is a lack of understanding about the Gender Equality Duty at local level and within the women’s sector there are concerns about how it is being interpreted, including illegal practices of funding being refused or withdrawn because services are women-only.
- In order for monitoring and evaluation processes to be effective, representation and engagement should be assessed through gender disaggregated data. Participation as well as attendance should be monitored.
- CLG needs to do more work to increase women and women’s organisations’ representation on LSPs. Local service delivery plans and engagement will not be truly effective unless more women and equalities groups are involved in the process.
- CLG needs to take ultimate responsibility for ensuring funding is available for specialist services where a need has been proven to exist. Women-only violence against women services, including specialist BME women’s services fall under this.

#### **What you can do**

- Find out who is representing the voluntary sector on your LSP (usually your local CVS). Arrange to meet with them and ask them to raise issues that you are concerned about.

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<sup>23</sup> Chapter 1, P16

<sup>24</sup> Gudnadottir, Elin, et al. (2007). *Where are the women in LSPs?: Women’s representation in Local Strategic Partnerships*. Urban Forum, Oxfam and Women’s Resource Centre. London.

- Have information ready about your organisation so you can provide evidence about the need for your service and how your work benefits the local community.
- Ensure your organisation is on the 'radar' of LSP members, including the council and other public bodies, such as Primary Care Trusts.
- Be prepared with good information and evidence about local women's needs as this may enable you to have more constructive conversations with others who are unaware of how and what issues are having particular impacts on women.
- You could ask the LSP about how they develop their local priorities, and how you can feed into this process. You can ask them to go beyond the usual 'consultation event' format and come out and meet with your organisation (and service users if appropriate) to get feedback on the key issues you work on.
- Keep in touch with local infrastructure organisations that often produce briefings on local policy consultation issues which summarise the key issues, or provide information in other ways.

### **Local Area Agreements<sup>25</sup>**

Local Area Agreements (LAAs) set out the priorities for the local area. They are three year agreements between central government, local authorities and their partners, through the LSP which aim to improve the local area. Government Offices in the regions work with local authorities and their partners to ensure targets in LAAs are met.

#### ***Key issues***

- LAAs will now play a significant role in determining what funding will be available to local third sector organisations, as well as directing the provision of local services, including commissioning
- Poor representation of women / women's organisations on LSPs and related groups means that priorities for women may be overlooked.
- The current round of LAAs has been decided and the next round will start in 2011.

#### ***What you can do***

- Ask to see a copy of the LAA, and see what targets are included in this. This should be publically accessible on your local council website, if you can't find it ring your local council or your LSP.
- Ask to see a copy of your local Sustainable Community Strategy, which outlines key local priorities.
- Ask if a Gender Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken on the LAA.
- Call attention to urgent issues not included in LAA targets in the run-up to local elections.
- Contact WRC to find out about our new research project which aims to support women's organisations to influence their LSPs and LAAs.

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<sup>25</sup> Chapter 1, P16

## **National Indicators<sup>26</sup>**

National indicators (NIs) are the performance framework for local government. They are now the only mechanism that central government uses to monitor local government. Out of a total list of 198 indicators, each local area has to include 17 compulsory indicators (primarily on education) and chooses a further 35 indicators, in consultation with local people and groups. These will be the only targets monitored by central government.

### ***Key Issues:***

- As the only mechanism that central government uses to monitor local government, these indicators are key for determining local priorities, work and funding.
- Some indicators, including two of the indicators on Violence against women, are still deferred.
- Each indicator has a definition, outlining what the target involves and what public bodies have to do to meet this target.

### ***What you can do***

- Ask your LSP what consultation process was used to feed into local priorities and targets, and how equalities was considered in this process.
- Groups can determine how their work and their issues 'fit' across the national indicators and compare this to the NIs chosen within their own LAA. Groups can show how, for example, violence against women (VAW), is a key issue for gender equality and for local women, and can challenge their LSP to include targets on VAW within their LAA (across health, community safety, economic well-being, as well as the few indicators specifically relating to VAW).
- You can also use evidence and arguments to challenge the Gender Equality Schemes of local bodies such as the local authority and the Primary Care Trust (PCT).
- If you think the National Indicators chosen by your local authority are wrong, then lobby your LSP in the run up to the local elections (starting 2010) as well as the run up to the next round of LAAs starting in 2011.
- Getting the support of other women's organisations in your area will help to strengthen your argument.

## **Comprehensive Area Assessment<sup>27</sup>**

The Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) is the new inspection framework for local government which starts in April 2009. It brings a number of inspectorates together to assess how well a local area is performing not only in terms of the local services provided but also as a place to live. It will measure progress against all 198 National Indicators and has a focus on addressing inequality.

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<sup>26</sup> Chapter 1, P17

<sup>27</sup> Chapter 1, P17

### **Key issues**

- The CAA will measure all 198 targets, not just the ones chosen for your LAA. this means there is opportunity to lobby your LSP about why they should be doing particular work, even if it doesn't fit into any chosen NIs.
- Once the CAA is released, we will have a clearer idea of how strong a focus there will be on addressing inequality.

### **What you can do**

- Each local area will have a CAA lead; contact them to let them know about how your organisation supports marginalised and vulnerable groups or to challenge/support their findings about your local community.
- Have you been involved in partnership working with the local authority / LSP? Tell the CAA lead your experiences of this.

## **Empowerment Fund<sup>28</sup>**

The White Paper announced that CLG would be consulting on a draft prospectus for a new £7.5m 'Empowerment Fund' which would provide support for "existing national third sector organisations operating across England which are helping local communities turn key proposals into practical action on the ground in areas such as community leadership, involvement in planning and social enterprise." This consultation has now closed and the prospectus has been published.

### **Key issues**

- The fund is predominantly aimed at infrastructure organisations.
- The draft prospectus had proposed thresholds for funding which would have excluded many smaller organisations (particularly equalities organisations which are often smaller in terms of income) from applying for the Fund. Urban Forum (along with WRC and numerous other voluntary and community organisations) lobbied to have the threshold reduced to ensure that smaller organisations could access the fund. This was successful: CLG reduced the threshold that organisations had to meet in order to apply and also said that partnership bids would be welcomed. However, the fund is still targeted at the national level.
- CLG have prioritised equality throughout the whole funding scheme.

### **What you can do**

- Urban Forum is continuing to press the government to support local engagement infrastructure. To find out more visit: [www.urbanforum.org.uk](http://www.urbanforum.org.uk)

## **Community leadership<sup>29</sup>**

The White Paper notes that "for communities to feel empowered they need leaders they trust who understand them and reflect their makeup".<sup>30</sup> This must include a bigger role for councillors as local leaders. It also includes a focus on encouraging women to become involved in leadership at a local level and are

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<sup>28</sup> Chapter 1, P29

<sup>29</sup> Chapter 2, P39

<sup>30</sup> P39

supported to do so. CLG focus on youth participation and we hope that this means equal involvement of young women's groups and their members.

### **Community development<sup>31</sup>**

CLG are "keen to support local authorities and LSPs who want to prioritise community development, by enabling other front-line workers to do more community building". We support involving service users in community development and would encourage this to be in an organised way to allow maximum participation from marginalised groups. However, there is no equalities focus for the training and it only seems to be available to local officials.

### **Communitybuilders fund<sup>32</sup>**

The White Paper acknowledges the financial needs of community-based organisations and their current lack of financial stability and announces that a new £70m Communitybuilders fund will be introduced. It states that the fund will be administered by a 'national partner'. The emphasis of the fund is on providing a space 'where people can come together and discuss their local concerns and channel them effectively and constructively into local decision-making' and giving organisations 'the ability to bid for and run local services...' Ultimately the aim appears to be to enable community organisations to operate as 'economically-viable social enterprises' which aren't 'perpetually dependent on grant funding.'

### **Grassroots grants<sup>33</sup>**

The White Paper highlights that there is a "need for immediate small grants funding for grassroots groups and the need to address the sustainability and independence of funding. The Government has recognised that small grants programmes are essential to support active community organisations including marginalised and excluded groups." Therefore they are proposing a scheme of Grassroots Grants, developed by the Office of the Third Sector and running from 2008-2011, offering small sums of money from an £80m fund, with an additional £50m community endowment fund "to help locally-based groups to survive and thrive." It is encouraging that the grants are focused on grassroots groups that have volunteer time as their main resource as this includes the majority of women's organisations. However, the amount of money groups can apply for is very small, with the maximum being £2,500, which is certainly not going to address issues of sustainability for the sector.

The aims of the grants are to:

- Increase immediate grant funding and capacity building support to small voluntary and community groups and organisations (grassroots groups) throughout England
- Increase the long term funding available to grassroots groups from community-owned endowments raised from local donors

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<sup>31</sup> Chapter 2, P40

<sup>32</sup> Chapter 2, P41

<sup>33</sup> Chapter 2, P42

- Improve the sustainability and quality of local grant making by strengthening independent funders throughout England

The grants were launched in September 2008 and are delivered by the Community Development Foundation (CDF). Local community groups are encouraged to apply directly to their local funder, details of which can be found on the CDF website.<sup>34</sup>

### **Petitions<sup>35</sup>**

This is a new duty on local councils to respond to all petitions relating to local authority functions or other public services where the council shares delivery responsibilities. If an overview and scrutiny committee decides that the council's response to the petition is inadequate, there is the opportunity for petitioners to secure a debate of the full council. If 5% of the local population sign a petition, a full council debate will be compulsory.

In addition, councillors now have new powers under the Community Call for Action. This will allow all councillors in England to refer matters to their council's overview and scrutiny committee for consideration. The aim of this new measure is to help frontline councillors raise matters on an authority's agenda on behalf of their constituents.

#### ***What you can do***

- Find out the process for submitting petitions to your local council and the numbers required for it to be accepted.
- Work with other VCS and local women's organisations to decide on the most important issues that you could petition the council about and make sure you all sign each others petitions.
- Lobby your local councillor to raise issues about gender equality and the needs of the women you work with through your LSP and local council.

### **Participatory budgeting<sup>36</sup>**

Participatory budgeting (PB) involves people in making decisions about how sections of local public budgets are allocated and invested. It is encouraging that the white paper notes that "it is important that socially excluded groups are not marginalised" in the development of approaches such as these and that "their inclusion helps to inform and balance community decision-making". In our response to the CLG consultation *Participatory Budgeting: A Draft National Strategy* in June 2008 we highlighted that PB needs to be firmly embedded within an equality and diversity framework with due regard paid to the Gender, Race and Disability Equalities Duties. The government wants PB to be rolled out across all local authority areas by 2012.

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<sup>34</sup> [http://www.cdf.org.uk/bfora/systems/xmlviewer/default.asp?arg=DS\\_CDF\\_TECHART\\_23/\\_page\\_xsl/27&xsl\\_argx=3](http://www.cdf.org.uk/bfora/systems/xmlviewer/default.asp?arg=DS_CDF_TECHART_23/_page_xsl/27&xsl_argx=3)

<sup>35</sup> Chapter 4, P65

<sup>36</sup> Chapter 4, P67

### **Key issues**

- Participatory budgeting should incorporate a gender-sensitive budgeting approach.
- In order for monitoring and evaluation processes to be effective, representation and engagement should be assessed through gender disaggregated data. Participation as well as attendance should be monitored.
- CLG needs to take ultimate responsibility for ensuring funding is available for specialist services where a need has been proven to exist. Women-only violence against women services, including specialist BME women's services fall under this.
- CLG needs to do more work to increase women and women's organisations' representation on LSPs. Local service delivery plans and engagement will not be truly effective unless more women and equalities groups are involved in the process.
- The Participatory Budgeting Unit<sup>37</sup> exists to support the development of participatory democracy through involvement in public budgets. It is the leading organisation supporting councils and communities interested in participatory budgeting.

### **What you can do**

- Get in touch with your local infrastructure organisation (such as Council for Voluntary Service, Rural Community Council), community empowerment network, equalities network or LSP lead (usually based in the council). They are likely to be involved in PB and can let you know about how you can get involved.
- Ask your local council if they are experimenting with PB and how you can get involved.
- Local councillors are elected to represent the whole community in your local council area. They have access to important knowledge and make many decisions that affect local services. Ask them how you can become involved to improve services.

### **Strengthening community voices<sup>38</sup>**

The CLG White Paper recognises 'that inclusive participative structures for third sector organisations are important in ensuring that the sector has a consistent, effective and accountable voice in local decision-making'. This was discussed in more detail in CLG's statutory guidance, *Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities*, which was published earlier this year.

Following this, CLG worked with the third sector to produce a 'discussion document' (in other words it contains no requirement for public bodies to take it into account) called *Principles of representation: A framework for effective third sector participation in Local Strategic Partnerships*. The emphasis is on the third sector to use the principles to organise effective representation on LSPs, with no obligation on local government to support this work, financially or otherwise.

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<sup>37</sup> <http://www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk/>

<sup>38</sup> Chapter 4, P73

## The Sustainable Communities Act 2007<sup>39</sup>

The Sustainable Communities Act 2007 aims to promote the economic, social or environmental well-being of local areas, including participation in civic and political activity. It provides a channel for people, through their local authority, to ask central government to take action to promote sustainable communities. The Act also ensures that communities will be better informed about public money that is spent in their area. Guidance was issued alongside the White Paper about how local authorities should work with panels of local representatives, including members from under-represented groups, on the best proposals for change in their area.<sup>40</sup>

### Key definitions at a glance

**The duty to involve:** means that an organisation must inform, consult and involve the people they serve. It will ensure that people have greater opportunities to influence decision making and get involved. This is being extended to other bodies including regional development agencies.

**Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs):** these partnerships made up of representatives from local authorities, health, police, local business and the voluntary and community sector, are now the key mechanism for deciding on local priorities, determining where the majority of the local funding will go and delivering the work outlined in the Local Area Agreements. They aim to provide a forum to create a shared vision and sense of priorities for an area and third sector organisations should be “full and equal partners”.

**Local Area Agreements (LAAs):** are three-year agreements about the priorities and work of each local area and are made up of a number of National Indicators. New LAAs are agreements between central government, local authorities and their partners, through the LSP, to improve services and the quality of life in an area.

**National Indicators (NI):** Out of a total list of 198 indicators, each local area has to include 17 compulsory indicators (primarily on education) and chooses a further 35 indicators, in consultation with local people and groups. They are now the only mechanism that central government uses to monitor local government. These indicators cover all the national priority outcomes which local authorities and their partners will be responsible for delivering. Performance against all the NIs will be assessed through the Comprehensive Area Assessment.

We encourage women’s organisations to think about how their work cuts across different policy areas. To see what NIs are in your LAA, go to [www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=8399555](http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=8399555)

For a list of the four NIs which relate to women and which local areas chose them for 2008 see

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<sup>39</sup> Chapter 4, P75

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/strongsafeprosperous>

[http://www.wrc.org.uk/resources/help\\_for\\_your\\_organisation/guides/guide\\_to\\_engaging\\_with\\_the\\_local\\_agenda.aspx](http://www.wrc.org.uk/resources/help_for_your_organisation/guides/guide_to_engaging_with_the_local_agenda.aspx)

**Independent Comprehensive Area Assessments (CAA):** these will be reported annually for each local area and will consist of an area assessment that looks at how well local public services are delivering better outcomes and how likely they are to improve in the future delivered by the Audit Commission and other inspectorates; and organisational assessments of individual public bodies.

## **Other WRC resources**

WRC has produced a range of local resources, including an article about local government policy and key policy levers you can use for action; a range of easy to read factsheets about key local government policy and mechanisms, including:

- Greater devolution of decision making from Whitehall to local authorities and local people: opportunities for influencing
- Duty to involve
- Local Strategic Partnerships
- Local Area Agreements
- Participatory Budgeting

We also have a large amount of research about the value and needs of women's organisations as part of our why women? campaign, which is calling on government to recognise systematic discrimination against women and to support the women's sector.

Go to [www.wrc.org.uk](http://www.wrc.org.uk) for more.

## **About the Women's Resource Centre**

WRC is a charity which supports women's organisations to be more effective and sustainable. We provide training, information, resources and one-to-one support on a range of organisational development issues. We also lobby decision makers on behalf of the women's not-for-profit sector for improved representation and funding.

Our members work in a wide range of fields including health, violence against women, employment, education, rights and equality, the criminal justice system and the environment. They deliver services to and campaign on behalf of some of the most marginalised communities of women.

There are over ten thousand people working or volunteering for our members who support almost half a million individuals each year.

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