

Community Empowerment White Paper launched

July 2008: Hazel Blears and Phil Hope launch new Community Empowerment White Paper

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

[Read the DTA press release.](#)

The Community Empowerment White Paper was launched on 9th July 2008 by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. The white paper includes the following announcements:

- A new 70 million Community Builders fund will be established to support community-led organisations in particular neighbourhood based community anchors according to Phil Hope to help them offer local community facilities, deliver local services, and be run as economically viable social enterprises without being perpetually dependent on grant funding. The fund incorporating 11m from the Office of the Third Sector and 59m from CLG and comprising 70% capital and 30% revenue, will be delivered by a national partner selected through a tendering process. The fund is expected to open for applications in April 2009.
- A new duty for councils to respond to petitions will be introduced in 2009. Councils will have to respond to petitions (including electronic petitions) in relation to local authority functions or other public services where Council shares delivery responsibility. The White Paper indicates that petitions could be applied on subjects ranging from the use of empty properties to the transfer of buildings to the community or a new school crossing. Importantly, the council's overview and scrutiny committee will be able to secure a debate of the full council if it decides the response is not adequate or substantive. The proposed threshold after which a petition leads to a full council debate is set by the White Paper at five per cent of the local population signing the petition. However the Paper notes that local authorities will be able to set lower thresholds.
- CLG will also consult on a new right to petition that would hold local officers to account. The proposition set out in the White Paper is that if enough people served by a local service or agency sign a local petition, senior officers working for a local public body should be required to attend a public hearing such as overview and scrutiny.
- All local authorities will be encouraged to use participatory budgeting by 2012. CLG will publish a National Strategy on participatory budgeting later this year to set out how the government's aspiration to have participatory budgeting in all local authorities will be achieved.
- A specialist asset transfer unit will be established by the autumn within the third sector. The new Asset Transfer Unit (ATU) will provide information and expertise on the transfer of publically owned assets to community management or ownership. It will build on the work of the Advancing Assets for Communities programme, led by the Development Trusts Association and its partners, and step up the number of asset transfers in line with the recommendations of the Quirk Review. The Quirk Team is expected to make further recommendations in the autumn.
- A new Social Enterprise Unit will be launched within the CLG in the autumn to champion the knowledge and expertise of social enterprises.
- A 7.5 million empowerment fund will replace the CLG's proposed strategic partners programme and provide support for existing national third sector organisations operating across England. The fund will focus on national organisations helping local communities turn key proposals into practical action on the ground in areas such as community leadership, involvement in planning and social enterprise. A consultation is being launched alongside the White Paper, with a commitment to launch the fund in late 2008.
- A Community Allowance allowing community organisations to pay people on benefits to do work that strengthens their communities without it affecting their benefits is being discussed by the Create Consortium, DWP and CLG, with an aim to pilot the idea.

Where legislative change is needed (e.g. petitioning) proposals in the White Paper will be progressed by CLG through the planned Community Empowerment, Housing and Economic Regeneration Bill (CEHER Bill), which will be introduced during the 2008-09 session.