



Office of the  
Deputy Prime Minister

Creating sustainable communities

## The future of local government



local:vision

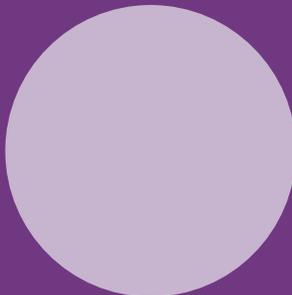
In partnership  
with local government

# The future of local government

Local government has a crucial role in modern democracy and in supporting the development of sustainable communities. It provides effective, democratically accountable leadership to local communities and joins up services to meet local needs and priorities. This unique position within the local community needs to be harnessed to deliver better outcomes for people and places through working effectively with partners at local, regional and national levels.

We want to be visionary and develop a picture of what local government across England should look like in ten years' time. This raises big and challenging questions. A vision for the future needs to capture how we can secure a better life for all within a rapidly changing world and the role of local government within that. We need an open debate with all those with an interest in local leadership and local service delivery, about what the long-term vision should be for local government and how, together, we can achieve this.

This is a prompt for that debate.



## A vision of the future

So what does the future look like?

We are seeking a debate on what the future might hold and what this means for local communities and for both local and central government. We have ideas but do not have all the answers. We want to hear your views.

We can picture strong, self-confident local authorities, leading and empowering their communities and working effectively with partners at local, regional and national levels in the delivery of high quality services. Is this a compelling picture?

This is already the reality in a number of areas, where local authorities are meeting local needs and priorities, combining effective leadership, good management, purposeful engagement with their communities and strong accountability, and joining up and balancing competing demands across the community. How can this good practice be spread in areas where this is not happening as effectively?

Any vision of the future raises questions about the relationship between central and local government and how this needs to develop to one that is based on genuine partnership, dialogue and trust. This will bring real challenges for both local and central government.

For local government this includes:

- demonstrating strong and vibrant political and managerial leadership;
- improving citizen engagement and participation;
- improving service delivery.

This will also bring important challenges for central government, such as:

- reforming and joining up central government;
- greater devolution to the local level, with clearer responsibilities and accountabilities at each level.

This is our initial thinking about the range of issues that should be considered and how collectively they will shape the future of local government. You may disagree with these issues and identify others. We need a debate so that we can hear your views.

## Starting the debate

To help start this debate we have identified a number of issues on which we wish to hear your views. These issues are not meant to be an exhaustive list. They are a starting point to help frame these discussions about what local government should look like in ten years, what this means for different services, the challenges that need to be overcome and new ways of working to realise this ambition.

### **Developing strong and vibrant community leadership**

...so that councils are run by vibrant civic leaders who lead and champion local places, secure better outcomes for citizens and are respected by the communities they serve and by partners in the public, private and voluntary sector. This suggests considering issues such as:

- developing a clearer and stronger role for councils as community leaders;
- attracting, retaining and equipping high calibre people to lead local government – politically and managerially;
- the implications this could have for existing roles and arrangements.

### **Improving citizen engagement and participation**

...so that more people are actively engaged in local issues such as the liveability and safety of their community and so that there is greater participation in local democracy such as increased turnout at elections. The issues to be considered include:

- increasing ways for people to get involved in local issues and local democracy including building on existing good practice at the local level;
- how best to build the capacity of communities to participate more effectively in issues of concern to them;
- how local government may need to organise itself to respond to these challenges.



## **Improving service delivery**

...so that we can meet the changing needs and rising expectations of local people. The issues to be considered include:

- the ways in which councils can improve services for which they are responsible within affordable budgets;
- how councils can tackle problems of underperformance with the support of each other, government and regulators;
- the role councils should have in influencing the delivery of services and outcomes over which they do not have direct control;
- how councils can increase customer focus and involvement in the delivery of their services whoever delivers them.

## **Developing a new relationship between central, regional and local government**

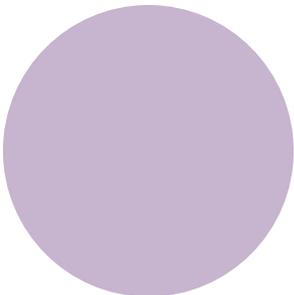
...that is coherent and stable and based on:

- clarifying the roles, functions and accountabilities in respect of individual services;
- developing a more tailored and co-ordinated relationship between the central government and individual councils, based on dialogue and trust.

## **Patterns of governance and local government finance**

A long-term vision for local government must include a vision of its future organisation. The outcome of the referendums on Elected Regional Assemblies will need to be reflected in these discussions.

The local government finance system needs to support the vision for local government, allowing councils to fund their activities in a way that promotes efficiency, accountability and fairness. The Balance of Funding Review is currently looking at options for funding local government and is due to report this summer.



## Next steps

Over the coming months we will be hosting and participating in a range of meetings and seminars across England, to debate the future of local government. The issues raised in this leaflet will help that debate.

We are not seeking specific responses to the issues raised here, but would welcome your views on the issues that need to be part of any conversation on the future of local government. The issues raised will be captured and used to shape further discussions and documents that will be published on the vision and specific issues over the coming year.

If you wish to find out more about our work on the future of local government, the debates, seminars and meetings taking place in your area, or respond to any issues raised in this leaflet and at these meetings please contact:

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