

Reshaping the Partnership Landscape

Briefing Note 1 – October 2010



The changing context...

The context for partnership working (and indeed the landscape around it) is rapidly changing. Alongside substantial **cuts in public spending**, councils and their partners are responding to the emerging **Localism and Devolution agenda**, the '**Big Society**', significant **Health and Policing reforms**, a changing regional and sub-regional landscape (including the replacement of Regional Development Agencies with **Local Enterprise Partnerships**), and the introduction of **Community (Place-Based) Budgets** (initially across 16 local areas) as announced in the Spending Review.¹

'The first **community budgets** will be run in **16 local areas from April 2011** for families with complex needs. These will pool departmental budgets for local public service partnerships to work together more effectively, help improve outcomes, and reduce duplication and waste.

All places may be able to operate these approaches from 2013-14. Councils and their partners will also have greater flexibility to work across boundaries in health, policing, worklessness and child poverty.'

HM Treasury, *Spending Review 2010*, October 2010

We have also seen, over the last five months or so, the removal of much of the top down partnership 'wiring'. There has been a complete scaling back of the formerly centralist and prescriptive performance and inspection framework with the abolition of the **Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA)**, the end to the system of **Public Service Agreements (PSAs)** and, as of the 12th October, the end of **Local Area Agreements (LAAs)**, along with the demise of the **National Indicator Set**.²

¹ The 16 community budgets will be in Greater Manchester, Leicestershire, Croydon, Blackpool, Islington, Hull, Kent, Blackburn with Darwen, Bradford, Swindon, Barnet, Lewisham, Essex, Lincolnshire, Birmingham and a group of London boroughs - Westminster, Kensington & Chelsea, Hammersmith & Fulham and Wandsworth (of these Birmingham, Bradford, Croydon, Kent, Leicestershire, Lewisham, and Manchester were previous Total Place pilots)

² '...under section 109 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, I am revoking all designations of local improvement targets in your Local Area Agreements from the

A shift towards greater local autonomy...localism, localism, localism...

The Coalition Government aspires to 'end the era of top down government' and to devolve more power and control down to the local level.³

"It's not my job to sit behind my desk like some sort of puppet master, pulling all the strings, taking all the decisions...so instead of red tape and regulation, instead of instructions and inspections, we're giving councils what they've wanted for decades.
Freedom. Power. Responsibility"

**Eric Pickles, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government,
13 October 2010**

The reduction in 'top-down' prescription coupled with a Coalition view on the 'localism' agenda, is fundamentally re-directing the focus for partnership working. We are seeing:

- much greater emphasis being placed on '**outward accountability**' – being held to account by the citizen rather than by Whitehall (data and transparency agenda);
- renewed interest in **localism and devolution** – and ensuring issues are addressed at the lowest practicable spatial level (principle of subsidiarity); and,
- a shift towards adopting more of an '**enabling**' role – helping people and communities do more for themselves and each other ('**Big Society**')

A shift towards increased productivity...

On the 20th October, the Chancellor set out the Government's four-year public spending plans. Whilst it will take some weeks to disaggregate the headline departmental figures and to know the detail of how this will play out locally through the distribution system, we know that on average central government funding to councils will decrease by around 26 per cent over the next four years.⁴

date of this letter. What this means is that I am handing over full control of all current Local Area Agreements to you...' Eric Pickles, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

³ HM Government, *The Coalition: our programme for government*, May 2010, p.11

(http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/409088/pfg_coalition.pdf)

⁴ HM Treasury, *Spending Review 2010*, October 2010, p.51

(http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/spend_index.htm)

In terms of implications for partnership working, it is worth noting that the Coalition Government has made it very clear all along that the Spending Review is about more than simply allocating resources. Government sees the Review as a platform to 'consider new and radical approaches to public service provision' and has laid down the gauntlet to local government and its partners to '**consider fundamental changes to the way in which they provide services**'.⁵

Whereas once the focus for partnership working was almost solely on improving outcomes - achieving efficiencies and ensuring 'value for money' has increasingly been coming to the fore. This shift towards increasing productivity is fundamentally re-directing the focus in that we are seeing galvanized interest in:

- **shared services, strategic integration** (front of house and back-office) and **joint strategic commissioning**; (e.g. the Westminster, Hammersmith & Fulham and Kensington & Chelsea 'super council')⁶
- a '**whole area**' ('one public sector') approach to managing **Community Budgets** (Place-Based Budgets), including the imminent reductions; and,
- shaping **markets** and **new models** for service delivery

Implications for Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs)...

The former focus for LSPs and their thematic sub-partnerships has changed dramatically in a short space of time (with the abolition of PSAs, LAAs and CAA). The reduction in reporting burdens has been welcome. The speed of change, and uncertainty over future frameworks, has been somewhat disorientating.

However, the general direction of travel towards localism, greater autonomy, and more freedoms is precisely what the sector has been lobbying for this past 12 months or more. As the 'dust begins to settle' many will see this as an opportunity to re-direct the future role of partnerships - to move away from bureaucracy and instead have a clearer and more practical focus on what needs to be done to both improve outcomes and reduce costs.

⁵ HM Treasury, *The Spending Review Framework*, June 2010, p.7
(http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/spending_review_framework_080610.pdf)

⁶ 'Plans for a London 'super council' took a further step forward this week when three borough leaders confirmed they would go ahead with merging all services. "Our plans may be the first of their kind, but sharing of services in this way can no longer be viewed as a radical concept. It will soon become the norm for local authorities looking for innovative ways to keep costs down while delivering high quality front line services." LocalGov, 22nd October 2010
(<http://www.localgov.co.uk/index.cfm?method=news.detail&id=92711>)

Reshaping the Partnership Landscape - a resource for partnerships

Many councils/LSPs are currently reviewing their partnership arrangements – both in terms of governance and work programmes – with a view to making them more fit for purpose.

Over the last two months Local Government Improvement and Development (LGID) has seen a gradual increase in the number of enquiries about what the future holds in store for partnerships (and requests for information about what other Councils and their LSPs are doing). In response, we have started to develop a **partnership ‘resource’** with the sector that places can use to inform/challenge their own thinking.

The resource will comprise of a **series of linked briefing notes/slide sets** on topics ranging from how councils and their partners are responding to the new context, to a more in-depth look at some of the key issues (see at foot of this note).

Briefing Note 1 – The focus for this first briefing note is on how councils and their partners are responding to the changing context

Over the last six weeks LGID has been working with individual councils and the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships (RIEPs) to gather intelligence on where the thinking has got to on future focus and arrangements for partnership working.

The following high-level analysis looks at emerging trends in relation to both function (future role/remit for partnerships), and form (future governance and support arrangements). It is important to note that this presents a ‘snapshot in time’ – the thinking is still evolving in the majority of places and is still subject to change (particularly as we still await the detail behind the Spending Review and also further important steps such as the forthcoming Localism Bill).⁷

A full summary of the feedback from councils/LSPs over the last six weeks is detailed at **Appendix A**.

⁷ In his speech on 13 October Eric Pickles talked about unveiling the Localism Bill ‘in a few weeks’ (<http://www.communities.gov.uk/speeches/corporate/townhallwaste>)

Headline findings:

The following provides a summary of the 'headline' findings from the intelligence gathered. Emerging trends in relation to both function and form are explored in more detail under the relevant sub-headings.

- **Commitment to working in partnership remains strong** - in fact in the majority of places it is seen as even more important in the new context – not less. Also, the **historical perception of partnership activity being more on the periphery rather than core to mainstream business is increasingly being challenged** (particularly in those places focusing on service re-design)
- In the majority of places, councils are working with their partners to **review the strategic aims and objectives (function) of their LSPs prior to considering future governance and support arrangements (form)**. A number of councils and their partners have developed a **set of key principles** to underpin this decision-making process (e.g. Cambridgeshire, Bradford and Lancashire).

Lancashire (County) - Seven essential 'operating principles' have emerged from the review discussions, that will determine the design of future arrangements: Exercise directive and focused leadership; Make a commitment to action; Do a small number of things supremely well, Build strong relationships; Establish lean and flexible structures for communication and decision making and eliminate duplication of activity; Hold each other to account; Review and learn.

- Several councils/LSPs have commented on their partnership reviews being **less about 'structure' and more about a change in thinking and behaviour**
- Where changes are being proposed, (particularly in relation to governance), the intention is to have these **in place by April 2011**.
- **Sustainable Community Strategies** (which remain a statutory duty) are still in the majority of places seen as **'core business'**. Most places are in the process of reviewing their SCS with the intention of reducing the number of priorities to **better reflect the new context, take account of emerging policy, and to also take account of a reduction in capacity**.
- There is evidence of councils and their partners looking to build on their **Total Place** experiences (vis-à-vis taking a 'whole area' approach to public services), and lots of interest in **community (place-based) budgets**. An increasing number of councils and their partners are beginning to explore more **transformational options for pooling and aligning** their collective resources in the future⁸.

⁸ LGA publications *Place-based budgets: the future governance of public services*, and *Local Budgets: building the Big Society from the neighbourhood up* on LGA website.

Future focus for partnership working (function) – emerging trends: The feedback over the last six weeks points to several emerging trends in terms of a new focus for partnership working in the future. It is worth noting that there is considerable overlap between all of these.

- In many places the **Productivity** agenda (**service re-design, strategic integration and joint strategic commissioning etc**) is beginning to be brought in under the ‘umbrella’ of the LSP – articulated in a number of places as a desire to move from ‘soft’ partnerships to ‘hard’ partnerships. This trend is common across all Local Authority ‘types’.

For example:

- **Wigan** (Met) - “accelerating work around innovation in partnerships - buildings, social enterprise, service re-design etc”
- **Solihul** (Met) - “priorities include integrated neighbourhood services (focus on challenging families, ASB and use of assets – Total Capital)”
- **Staffordshire** (County) – “joint programme of efficiency projects between the Local Authorities. Broad brush discussions between county and NHS and police”
- **St Albans** (District) - “more emphasis on work around joining up services and rationalising estates/workforce”
- **Ealing** (London Borough) - “the LSP has a considerable and fundamental role to play in facilitating delivery of value for money and efficiency across partners”
- **Blackburn with Darwen** (Unitary) - has a strong focus on integrating services across agencies and has already made a good deal of progress - but are keen to go even further (and are hoping that community (place-based) budgets could provide them with the means to do so)

Leicestershire (County) - the Leicestershire Together Executive Group recently agreed that a radical change in the way partners work together was required in response to the substantial reductions in public expenditure if public service performance is to be maintained at currently high levels; and that a **pooled budget joint commissioning model** would provide the basis of this radical change.

- **Devon** (County) - “has commissioned a task and finish group to focus on ‘Locality Service Re-design’ (links with community capacity and self reliance; role of other sectors e.g. VCS; and public sector service delivery/ use of assets - not just Local Authorities also other agencies)”
- **Cornwall** (Unitary) - “consensus by Cornwall’s Public Services Group on 4 high level themes (at the end of August) that were essentially around driving efficiency and improving service delivery”
- **Staffordshire** (County) - “recent (13th Sept) agreement to set of priorities for joint efficiency activity”
- **Stoke** (Unitary) - “drive to work out a set of collaborative tasks for efficiency”

- **Dudley** (Met) - “the Executive Support Team has sought to use the partnership structures to try to develop new ways of working. At the moment it is leading work on asset management as well as systems thinking, alongside the more traditional work of delivering the SCS”

Interestingly, the above trend appears to be very much in tune with what the new Coalition Government sees as being ‘core business’ for public service partnerships in the future (with their focus on customer-centric service re-design and strategic integration – e.g. their work with the Capital and Asset Pathfinders).

- In many places the LSP is also being used as the ‘vehicle’ to **manage the retrenchment of the local state...**

For example:

Devon (County) – the Strategic Partnership has commissioned a task and finish group to focus on **managing the transformation to a smaller public sector** (with particular reference to the impact on jobs). The primary tool that is being developed is the broadening of the remit of the existing Area Action Force (http://www.southwestrda.org.uk/working_with_you/working_with_business/planning_for_recovery/area_action_forces.aspx) to make it proactive rather than reactive and focused across Devon rather than in particular hot spots. Other areas of work that may be pursued are around the effects of the smaller public sector on various vulnerable groups.

...including developing Joint Strategies to minimise the impact of budget reductions.

Somerset (County) - Executive leaders of public services in Somerset are sharing insights into the scale of change individual organisations are facing and how this will impact locally on services. **Building on a shared understanding Somerset will then look at how it might work together on a shared agenda** and how best to engage with wider stakeholders beyond the public sector.

- In many places greater emphasis is being given to ‘**neighbourhood/locality working**’ - more effectively integrating services at the very local level, (reducing duplication etc), alongside a focus on empowering and building capacity within neighbourhoods and communities (to enable them to do more for themselves and each other). Key influences are the **localism agenda** and ‘**Big Society**’. Again, this trend is common across all Local Authority ‘types’.

For example:

- **Wirral** (Met) - “impetus to move decision making closer to the residents”
- **Herefordshire** (Unitary) – “partnership agreement to focus on 9 localities from which partners will deliver services jointly”

Durham (Unitary) – in Durham they have established 14 **Area Action Partnerships** (AAP). They asked local people to define the boundaries based on their views of 'neighbourhood' (so the 14 vary in size and population). **Each AAP has 21 members (made up of three 'groups') – 7 partners (Council, Health, Fire, Police et al), 7 councillors and 7 members of the general public.** Each AAP has a chair and 2 vice chairs (one from each of the three 'groups' of members) – which they rotate on an annual basis. Each AAP has a devolved budget. They see community (place-based) budgets potentially being channelled through the AAPs in the future.

- **Cheshire West** (Unitary) – “developing area partnership boards with commissioning responsibility”
- **Shropshire** (Unitary) – “work programme being updated to include community (place-based) budgets and more locality focus”
- **Stoke** (Unitary) – “strong interest in Stoke version of neighbourhood working – called Local Matters”
- **Blackburn with Darwen** (Unitary) – they have integrated service delivery/engagement arrangements at the neighbourhood level in the form of 5 Agency Area Partnerships, alongside 5 Neighbourhood Boards

North Yorkshire Coast Community Partnership/ Scarborough Borough Council (District) - the LSP is informed and influenced by 4 Area Forums, including via the Forum Chairs who sit on the LSP Board. **The Area Forums provide an opportunity for members of the community, (who set the agendas), elected representatives and service providers to work together to try and find solutions to local issues.**

- **Sheffield** (Met) – “a fundamental change is the emphasis on "Community Partnerships" to provide governance and accountability at a level closer to citizens”
- **Selby** (District) – “setting up 5 Community Engagement Forums, each with its own head of service and community development plan, which will feed into the SCS & Local Development Framework”
- **East Riding of Yorkshire** (Unitary) – “taking on board the need to embed greater citizen involvement in agreeing outcomes and priorities for an area, together with the requirements of the Big Society. It is possible that the role of the LSP's local action teams will be further developed to help deliver this”

Coupled with the above is the desire to target interventions more effectively with reference to spatial definition – i.e. giving consideration to which issues would best be addressed at the very local (neighbourhood), district/borough, county, sub-regional or regional level. Several LSPs have adopted a principle of subsidiarity.

Cambridgeshire (County) – partners have developed a set of principles for improving the way they work together. Their first principle is that of subsidiarity – reinforcing localism and that **issues should as far as possible be addressed at the lowest appropriate spatial level.**

Future governance and support arrangements (form): In the majority of places consideration of changing function (as highlighted above) is leading to a review of existing form.

The most obvious trend (one which will come as no surprise to anyone) is that virtually all councils (along with their partners) are **streamlining their arrangements** - moving to more flexible ('nimble') partnership arrangements and, in the majority of cases, reducing the number of static structures in favour of 'task and finish' groups. A fair number of places are also looking at **introducing neighbourhood/locality arrangements** (very much in tune with the shift in terms of future focus as outlined above). These trends are common across all Local Authority 'types'.

For example:

- **Sandwell** (Met) - "looking to streamline and to move to more flexible arrangements"
- **South Lakes** (District) – "As form follows function - will be looking at how the LSP can be better 'outcomes delivery focused' through joint projects and pooled resources to compensate for cuts. This will result in a more dynamic less static structure in due course"
- **Buckinghamshire** (County) – "one of the LAA thematic partnerships has already disbanded as a standing committee and has transformed into a task and finish style of working to support the already good work that is being undertaken on the ground"

Cambridgeshire (County) - a Task/Finish Group of senior officers from across the partnership was recently commissioned to develop a new 'model' of partnership working, one that would:

- rebalance their activity and services on local priorities defined by a plan for Cambridgeshire not those prescribed by Central Government.
- create flexible and dynamic structures that could respond to changing local priorities or external issues
- move away from static partnerships to supporting Officers to work together in communities, practically as one team on the ground
- release costs by cutting the number of partnerships, meetings and bureaucracy.

At their last meeting, partners considered disbanding current arrangements in favour of a more streamlined approach (reducing the number of countywide thematic partnerships from 7 to 3 and the number of sub-thematic partnerships from in excess of 35 to 0).

- **Hackney** (London Borough) – "thinking of retaining thematic partnerships much as they are but moving to a 'Design & Delivery' approach to strategic commissioning below these" (i.e. instead of having thematic sub-partnerships)
- **Devon** (County) – "Devon Strategic Partnership has commissioned 2 multi-sector/multi-agency Task and Finish Groups to develop and plan the implementation of specific areas for future partnership working"

Cheshire West (Unitary) - whilst discussions are at an early stage, it is clear that they are moving towards a leaner and **more tightly focused structure** at borough level and below. Specifically, some of the thematic partnerships are likely to morph into task and finish project groups around priority issues. **Also likely to see a significant and potentially swift evolution of Area Partnership Boards, with a greater emphasis on commissioning.**

- **Worcestershire** (County) – “one of the proposed changes is that the Public Services Executive Group (which was originally set up independent of the LSP and which oversaw the Total Place pilot) should be brought in under the new streamlined structure”
- **Leeds** (Met) – “a review of the Leeds Initiative is likely to see a major streamlining of the current structure, with a new strategic plan for the city, with fewer key outcomes and targets, and a new high level Board. There are likely to be only four sub themed partnerships under this Board”

Cornwall (Unitary) - The proposed new partnership model is due to be debated by the Cornwall Strategic Partnership Board shortly. In addition to the **creation of a new Health and Wellbeing Board (a “people” Board), in line with the Government White Paper, and a Local Enterprise Partnership (a Place”) Board**, the overarching management would be provided by an integrated senior leadership team, with membership appropriate to the programme of work, rather than standing structures with fixed membership. There will be a **strong focus on enhanced communication channels, engagement and joint commissioning.**

- **Copeland** (District) – “we won't have a LSP Board, but quarterly ‘localities together’ meetings and two Copeland Partnership Conferences per year. The LSP framework is minimising the number of meetings and focusing on tasks and engagement at the appropriate level”
- In many cases **partnership support arrangements** are also being streamlined (with those teams historically funded through Neighbourhood Renewal Funding, Performance Reward Grant and Area Based Grant being ‘hardest hit’). Interestingly there’s some appetite to explore the possibility of having **‘one pooled support’** team to ‘service’ all of the member agencies’ partnership support needs – some partnerships are already moving towards having a joint strategic intelligence function.
- In the majority of places, councils and their partners are also beginning to take account of **changes to the regional and sub-regional ‘landscape’** around them. These include the emergence of **new forms of thematic partnerships** (Local Enterprise Partnerships and statutory Health and Wellbeing Boards), alongside current **policing and health reforms** (directly elected police and crime commissioners, and new relationships with GPs).

For example:

- **Cheshire West** (Unitary) – “started to discuss the effectiveness of the current LSP architecture in the light of the growing significance of sub-regional partnership working”
- **St Helens** (Met) – “...adjustments will also be needed to CDRP work post elected Commissioners, to Children’s Trust arrangements and to take account of a possible Liverpool City Region LEP”
- **North Yorkshire Coast Community Partnership** (District) – “Discussion planned at December Board meeting about new partnership structures e.g. LEP, Health and Wellbeing Board, Public Sector Board and implications for the LSP.”
- **Blackburn with Darwen** (Unitary) – already have a Pennine Lancashire MAA - with a focus on supporting economic growth and have submitted a LEP proposal to potentially cover the same ‘footprint’

North Yorkshire (County) - Partners have agreed informally that a review is needed - formal decision to be taken at Local Government North Yorkshire and York on 8 October 2010. **Detail of review will be linked to outcome of LEP proposals; changes being proposed by the government with regard to children's trusts / health and well-being boards / community safety partnerships; and the outcomes of SCS priority discussions.**

- **Telford and Wrekin** (Unitary) – “discussion underway on restructure of Health and Wellbeing Board and Revision of the Children’s Trust”
- **Warwickshire** (County) – “intention to progress the Health & Wellbeing Board asap; and considering possible implications of an elected Police Commissioner”
- **Worcestershire** (County) – “currently considering relationship with a possible county-wide LEP”

Ryedale (District) - **since April 2010 the Boards of the Strategic Partnership and Safer Ryedale have been amalgamated.** The decision was taken for several reasons including that membership was almost the same with just two members of the CSP not on the LSP Board; the relatively low crime rate and good track record of Safer Ryedale.⁹

- A further governance trend is that councils and partners appear to be ‘gearing themselves up’ for **community (place-based) budgets**.

For example:

- **Birmingham** (Met) - “review in hand – although lots depends on community (place-based) budgets”
- **Shropshire** (Unitary) - “being updated to include community (place-based) budgets and more locality focus”

⁹ Interestingly, this is something that the Home Office is very interested in.

Peterborough (Unitary) - the council and its partners carried out a review of their LSP last year to improve its efficiency and effectiveness. Recommendations from the review included a strengthened Executive (now **evolving into a 'One Place' Board**), new strategic commissioning teams, more focused partnership boards and a more integrated GPP secretariat. Partners are currently working on developing a **'single business plan' for Peterborough**.

- **Plymouth** – (Unitary) “major budget pressures have led the partnership to develop an integrated approach to planning and budget-setting between particularly the four main public sector LSP partners (Police, Council, NHS and Fire)”
- **Barnsley** – (Met) “a community (place-based) budgeting approach will underpin the work of the LSP going forward”

Barnet (London Borough) – is keen to take forward a community (place-based) budget, in which the revised One Barnet Board/LSP would act as a **single commissioner overseeing the allocation of all resources locally**, while still having democratic accountability at its heart...

Summing up...

As previously highlighted, it is important to remember that for the majority of places these trends and shifts of emphasis are still very much ‘work in progress’. What the intelligence does appear to confirm is that partnership working is seen as an ‘essential ingredient’ in the new context; and indeed that in the majority of places the LSP (albeit reconstituted and probably re-branded too) is still seen as having a central role to play.

Despite their established profile LSPs have in the past been seen as lacking in ‘teeth’ – wholly dependent on powers of persuasion and influence. Some of the responses from councils and partners over the last few weeks suggest that this issue will resurface if we are to be adequately equipped to meet the challenges ahead. Some see this ‘deficit’ as potentially being filled via a formally constituted (and locally accountable) governance body of some kind responsible for the new community (place-based) budgets.¹⁰

Finally, what is also clear from the feedback is that partners need to have a much more practical focus on where their joint endeavours can add most value - which is likely to mean having a much smaller number of clearly defined priorities in the future. The fact that we have just been given ‘full control’ of LAAs, gives us the long-awaited opportunity to do just that. The challenge now for councils and their partners will be to ensure that the ‘baby is not thrown out with the bathwater’.

¹⁰ ‘...exactly how this body is constituted would be a matter for local decision but it would need to have a legal form and be fully democratically accountable locally’ (LGA *Local Budgets – building the Big Society from the neighbourhood up*, October 2010, p.13)

Briefing notes to follow

Over the coming weeks colleagues across LGID will be working on a series of further briefing notes/slide sets – focusing in more detail on some of the outstanding questions and key issues impacting on future arrangements for partnership working.

Topics likely to be covered include:

- **Future governance ‘models’/arrangements** (taking account of the changing regional and sub regional landscape; the role of elected members (and the directly elected police and crime commissioners) and the introduction of community/place-based budgets...)
- **NHS reforms:**
 - Health & Wellbeing Boards
 - engaging local GPs
- **Policing reforms:**
 - elected policing and crime commissioners (to replace Police Authorities)
 - strengthened arrangements for community involvement
- **Emergence of “Big Society”**
- **Changing role for the Voluntary and Community and Private Sectors**
- **Two/three tier working** – (with particular reference to the role of Districts in a changing landscape for partnership working)
- **Area-based performance management (in the absence of CAA)** – As the Government dismantles the current framework for assessing and inspecting councils the LG Group has published – for consultation – a new ambitious approach to sector self regulation and improvement. Key components include:
 - transparent performance information;
 - self assessment and peer challenge;
 - a new early warning system to manage the risk of underperformance and reductions in data reporting to Government and Inspection.

The consultation document can be downloaded at:
<http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/core/page.do?pagelId=13733927>

- **Analysis of the forthcoming Localism Bill**