



Delivering Localism

***How Liberal Democrats
in Government are
helping to set
councils free***



Spring 2011

Foreword

Rt Hon Nick Clegg MP, Leader of the Liberal Democrats & Deputy Prime Minister



Our Party, more than any other, is built on our achievements in local government. Community activism, community politics, working hard all year round, delivering for local people – these are the watchwords of Liberal Democrats up and down the country. And rightly so. Localism is in our DNA and every Liberal Democrat knows that real change starts from the bottom up with local people and local communities.

Now we are in government in Westminster we are doing all we can to make the structural changes in central government to allow localism to flourish and to make devolution of power a reality. As this pamphlet shows very clearly, across a range of areas we have been removing the rules from on high that so disfigured the previous government's approach to local government. Unlike them we trust local government; not just to tick boxes or jump through hoops but to make real decisions.

These are changes that have come about thanks to the tireless work of our ministers, led by Andrew Stunell MP. Changes that Labour had thirteen years to deliver on and failed to do so, but which Liberal Democrat ministers have delivered in ten short months. Our ministers have fought tooth and nail inside Westminster and Whitehall to deliver on our commitments, a record that speaks for itself. Of course it is a work in progress: the significant steps we have already taken – which this pamphlet narrates – are the beginning of our localism agenda, not the end.

As we all know real localism means giving local government real choices. We were right to end ring-fencing and central diktat in the way we have. And yes –

sometimes that does indeed mean hard and complicated choices, and having to weigh up competing demands in a way which hasn't happened before. But that is as it should be; local people and their elected representatives will always know better than central bureaucrats what the right decisions for their area are. I know that Liberal Democrat councils and councillors are getting these decisions right.

I've seen for myself when I travel the country the real difference that good Liberal Democrat councils can make to people's lives, even in these economically difficult times. In my own city of Sheffield Paul Scriven and his team have kept job losses to a minimum whilst protecting frontline services. A pattern repeated across the country in flagship Liberal Democrat councils such as Bristol, Sutton, Chesterfield and Portsmouth.

This year's local elections will be challenging for our Party; there is no denying that. But I know that when Liberal Democrat councillors and campaigners get out on the doorstep and explain to voters why we have taken the decisions we have taken, both locally and nationally, we will have a strong story to tell.



Nick Clegg MP

Health

The Department of Health (DH) is responsible for healthcare, public health and social care. Paul Burstow MP is the Liberal Democrat Health Minister.

The Health and Social Care Bill presently in Parliament will be:

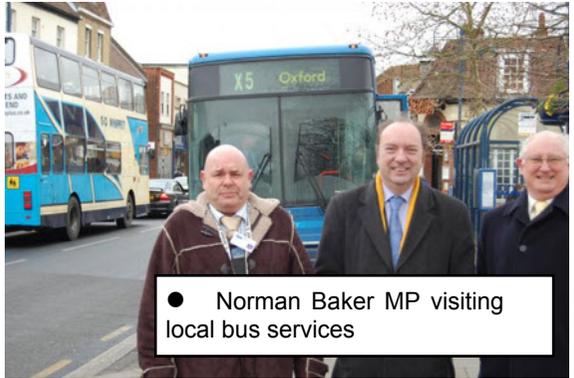
- ✓ Increasing Local Authorities' responsibility for health improvement currently carried out by Primary Care Trusts (PCTs), which, along with Strategic Health Authorities (SHAs), will be abolished. It will mean that hospitals and other health services become 'Foundation Trusts', which are free from central government interference
- ✓ Increasing Local Authority control over health priorities by establishing health and wellbeing boards, which will have responsibility for planning local services jointly with the NHS and social services and improving health in each local area
- ✓ Enhancing the ability of local charities and social enterprises to provide services to NHS patients, free of charge, either together with the NHS or on their own
- ✓ Increasing Local Authority powers over health prevention and improvement by transferring responsibility for public health to Local Authorities. This will help Local Authorities join up services more effectively, reduce costs and encourage preventative health



Transport

The Department for Transport (DfT) is responsible for aviation, railways, shipping, roads, and the necessary functions and infrastructure to support transport. Norman Baker MP is the Lib Dem Transport Minister who has been working to:

- ✓ Reduce ineffective bureaucratic processes by eliminating a number of data sets local authorities must collect and report on
- ✓ Enhance flexibility and financial autonomy of Local Authorities by simplifying local transport funding, moving from 26 streams to just 4.
- ✓ Empower local transport authorities outside London to develop and fund sustainable transport projects to help economic growth and reduce carbon in their communities through the launch of the four year £560 million Local Sustainable Transport Fund
- ✓ Increase Local Authority control over how their roads appear on maps and satnav systems – helping them better direct traffic – by eliminating the need for Whitehall to approve local road classification changes and devolving this authority to councils
- ✓ The Department has also been listening to the LGA’s concerns and adding an extra £100 million to the roads budget this year for local authorities to repair potholes, following the exceptionally harsh winter



Communities and Local Government



● Andrew Stunell MP meeting with Lib Dem Councillors

DCLG is the lead Government Department on the coalition's localism agenda.

The Localism Bill currently going through Parliament that paves the way for a significant devolution of power from central government to local town halls and communities. Andrew Stunell MP is the Lib Dem Local Government Minister. Measures

in this bill include:

- ✓ Introducing a General Power of Competence for Local Authorities. This will give councils greater freedom to do anything which any individual may do that is not specifically prohibited by law – giving them more flexibility to innovate in response to local needs
- ✓ Introducing new Community Rights, including the Right to Buy and Manage local assets threatened with closure and the Right to Challenge to run local authority services. These moves will allow local groups to take over struggling services if they can prove they can do it cheaper, and to save important community facilities from disappearing, like pubs, post offices or leisure centres faced with closure
- ✓ Introducing plans to democratise the planning system, by scrapping the Infrastructure Planning Commission, and putting power to decide the future shape of their area into the hands of local communities by promoting their development of Neighbourhood plans
- ✓ Scrapping the ineffective, costly and centrally-imposed Standards Board regime, allowing councils to devise their own regimes to regulate

councillors and empowering local people to hold their elected representatives to account.

- ✓ Ending “Predetermination Rules” that prevent councillors from speaking out and acting on local issues because of the risk of challenge that they are biased
- ✓ Giving councils the power to set their own governance structures, including returning to the old committee system if they choose
- ✓ Enhancing Local Authority decision making by abolishing the top-down Regional Spatial Strategies in favour of local planning that better reflects the needs of the local community
- ✓ Providing Local Authorities with more freedom and flexibility over the allocation of social housing, including the option to introduce fixed term tenancies if they choose, in addition to retaining lifetime tenure. This will allow a local authority to manage its social housing in a way that matches the needs of its local area, and provides a partial solution to the twin problems of overcrowding and under-occupation
- ✓ Reforming the ineffective Housing Revenue Account – the so-called “Tenant Tax” – giving councils greater financial freedom.

DCLG has also been busy promoting the Localism Agenda in a variety of other ways, including:

- ✓ Replacing the ineffective Regional Development Agencies in favour of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), driven from the bottom up
- ✓ Ending ringfencing of over £7bn worth of funds from central government (except schools and public health) ensuring that councils have much more freedom to manage their money on the priorities in their local area
- ✓ Promoting the Big Society through four “Vanguard” Authorities, including Lib Dem Sutton. These Vanguards will act as pilots for many of

the reforms that the Localism Bill will enable all councils to take part in, and will promote innovation and enhance local decision making

- ✓ Abolished the Comprehensive Area Assessment, the Local Area Agreements and the Audit Commission, thereby eliminating the expensive system of performance data sets, targets and inspection used by central government to oversee local government
- ✓ Eliminating the central imposition of Council Tax caps on local government from 2012, and instead putting power in the hands of local residents who will be able to decide on whether council tax should rise above a certain level through a referendum
- ✓ Enhancing Local Authorities influence over economic development and respond to the needs of local business by giving them the power to grant discounts in business rates
- ✓ Enhancing Local Authorities freedom and flexibility by allowing 'community budgets', i.e. where public funds from different sources are pooled together to tackle difficult cross-cutting issues within an area. Community budgets will be piloted in 16 places in 2011, with the aim of making them available everywhere
- ✓ Enhancing Local Authorities' ability to encourage and manage growth by introducing the New Homes Bonus which matches the funds from the additional council tax raised by new homes and empty properties brought back into use – with councils able to spend the money however they wish
- ✓ Undertaking the Local Government Resource Review, which aims to assess and make recommendations on which responsibilities and financial powers should be devolved to Local Authorities
- ✓ Boosting Local Authorities' ability to invest in infrastructure and capital projects that support local economic growth by introducing Tax Increment Financing (TIF), which enables Local Authorities to borrow on

the basis that any loan is repaid from future income generated from economic development

- ✓ Enhancing Local Authorities' decision-making power over resources used in their area by transferring central government control over council tax benefit to Local Authorities

Work and Pensions

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is responsible for welfare provision and state pension provision, and has a key role in alleviating child poverty. Steve Webb MP is the Liberal Democrat DWP Minister who has been working to:



- ✓ Localise Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans
- ✓ Enable Work Programme providers to work with local authorities and other partners to design support programmes
- ✓ Strengthen requirements for Work Programme providers to involve more local partners – including Voluntary Sector organisations – to enable more diverse and appropriate services
- ✓ Introduce a New “Right-to-Control” which will give disabled adults more control over how money is spent, enabling them to better utilise local resources
- ✓ Introduce greater autonomy for local JobCentre Plus and providing funds for them to tailor back-to-work services for local areas, which will enable them to work more effectively with local authorities to address local issues

Energy and Climate Change

The Department for Energy and Climate Change (DECC) is responsible for energy markets and energy security; and taking action on climate change whilst looking after the interests of consumers. Chris Huhne MP is the Liberal Democrat Secretary of State. His work has involved:



- ✓ Empowering communities with the Green Deal on energy efficiency and low carbon communities challenge
- ✓ Local Authorities have been allowed to sell renewable electricity
- ✓ Working with communities to retain business rates from renewable energy projects
- ✓ Reducing regulatory burdens including eliminating the data requirement for local authorities on fuel poverty
- ✓ Supporting communities interested in renewable projects through a new community energy online website
- ✓ Publishing Local Authorities' emission data and looking at how to make the data more useful, and more smart meters for consumers that let them know how much energy they are using

Business, Innovation and Skills



The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) is responsible for skills, higher education, innovation, science, employment, business, trade, and consumers. Vince Cable MP is the Liberal Democrat Secretary of State and Ed Davey MP is the Liberal Democrat Minister. Their work has included:

- ✓ Establishing Local Enterprise Partnerships which are developing across the country with local authority and business leadership
- ✓ Establishing the Regional Growth Fund which will help local areas to meet their economic development needs; bids have been strongly led by local government
- ✓ Protecting Post Offices by putting the Royal Mail on a stable financial and operational foundation which is fit for the 21st century and working with local authorities on making this the “front office” for government
- ✓ Launching the Local Business Finance Review which will promote local authorities’ link with business
- ✓ Developing a more flexible planning system which responds to local people, communities and businesses



Education

The Department for Education (DfE) is responsible for general education (up to 19) and children's services. Sarah Teather MP is the Liberal Democrat Minister at the DfE. Her work has involved:



- ✓ Increasing schools and Local Authority flexibility by reducing data collection requirements, targets, monitoring and prescription both by the department and its agencies (e.g. Ofsted)
- ✓ Working on policies to reduce central control further and focus data collection
- ✓ Empowering communities by giving schools more autonomy and flexibility over their curriculum whilst maintaining Local Authority strategic oversight
- ✓ Increasing Local Authorities' strategic role and responsibility for fair admissions and school improvement
- ✓ Reducing the number of ring fenced grants from 14 to 2, and supporting community budgets for families with multiple problems
- ✓ Granting schools more freedom over setting pay scales, giving schools more freedom from governmental bureaucracy
- ✓ Reforming league tables to give communities more meaningful information which truly reflects the performance of a school

Home Office

The Home Office (HO) is responsible for immigration and passports, drugs policy, crime, counter-terrorism and police. Lynne Featherstone MP is the Liberal Democrat Home Office minister. Her work has involved:



- ✓ Freeing local police forces from central government control by removing the last top down policing target and the mandatory policing pledge
- ✓ Police forces are now required to release crime data in open and standardised ways, helping to reduce high levels of bureaucracy and “form filling”. The Home Office will also be making similar details available on its activities
- ✓ Ensuring that Local Authorities will play a key role on Police and Crime Panels, established to serve as checks and balances on Police and Crime Commissioners

Justice

The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) is responsible for the justice system, the management of offenders, and the democratic constitutional settlement. Lord McNally is the Liberal Democrat Justice Minister. His work has involved:

- ✓ Increasing Local Authority freedom and flexibility by removing targets while statistic services are being improved to support local delivery instead, with one simple re-offending measure, reducing bureaucracy on probation trusts, giving prisons greater discretion and planning to reduce central control of youth offending teams



- ✓ Devolving commissioning of rehabilitation services to local commissioners; reorganising probation into areas contiguous with local authorities
- ✓ Increasing the use of local Neighbourhood Justice Panels that give local people more control over punishments for anti-social behaviour
- ✓ Developing incentives for local partners to share the benefits of reducing crime, supporting community budgets for problem families
- ✓ Enhancing Local Authority flexibility and autonomy by eliminating ring-fenced money for youth offending teams
- ✓ Commissioning rehabilitation services in regional blocks rather than providing these directly, testing social impact bonds, a new commissioning model for victim services, considering PBR in court enforcement fine collection, and developing a prison capacity strategy
- ✓ Publishing sentencing data in standard format, consulting on other statistics, looking at mapping justice outcomes at street level, and extend the Freedom of Information Act
- ✓ Scrapping ID Cards and the national identity register; ended child detention, slashed detention without charge times to 14 days, abolished control orders and introduced much fairer measures (TPIMS)
- ✓ Empowering local communities by enabling communities to influence community payback work
- ✓ Increasing the influence of local criminal justice partners by developing a reciprocal duty to cooperate between them and new commissioners

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) is responsible for the natural environment, sustainable development, food, farming and fisheries, animal welfare, and rural communities. Work here has involved:

- ✓ Increasing Local Authority flexibility by reducing the bureaucratic burden on local authorities
- ✓ Conducting a review of waste policies to remove barriers to local decision making and reforming food labelling
- ✓ Working with communities and landowners to create permanent rights of way and developing a new designation for valued community green areas
- ✓ Publishing 240 data sets and plan to publish 150 more during 2011, taking forward a right to data approach with the public to enhance transparency

Culture, Media, and Sport

The Department for Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS) is responsible for the Olympics, alcohol, gambling, the arts, broadcasting, cultural heritage, libraries, tourism, museums and galleries, and sport. Work here has involved:

- ✓ Piloting work on the value and impact of money spent by DCMS and its agencies in Birmingham with Birmingham City Council
- ✓ Protected free admission to national museums and galleries and placed Government owned art works in public galleries for the first time; exploring whether non-national museums could be sponsored outside of DCMS

Now it's over to us



Cllr Richard Kemp, LGA Lib Dem Group Leader

Ever since 1970 I have been a keen advocate and indeed practitioner of the dual approach to politics. Work to get elected and do the business within the town hall and parliament but also work within communities to empower and support them.

For years I have been able to make excuses about my manifest failures! It's always, "the Government's fault"; or "the planning inspectors won't let us do that"; or "the law says, 'No!'"

Now we all have fewer places to hide but far more opportunity to deliver our brand of liberal democracy. The foreword by Nick Clegg and the impressive recital by ministers of the localism that they have delivered - or are delivering - in government mean that we now can and must rise to the challenge.

The Localism Bill alone will mean that many councillors will have to change their ways – it will move the focus of our work from the town hall to our communities. Councillors will truly have to become community politicians rather than just party politicians. Let's just look at the different ways councillors will need to change by the proposed changes in planning law:

Councillors will need to:

- ✓ be proactive in helping the community develop their ideas for the neighbourhood in which they live
- ✓ act as mediators in a process between potential developers an planning applicants and the community as they work to lever in changes
- ✓ act across our councils to piece together neighbourhood-based ideas with council-wide strategies

Liberal Democrats of course already understand and work to fulfil these roles. Too many councillors do not! Change is always difficult but it should be easier

for us than anyone else. We believe in bottom up politics and empowered communities: pity our hapless opponents particularly in the Tory Party who believe in autocratic politics and the primacy of the party and the council chamber.

To make these changes we need support and time. We need to put resources into the cultural and technical changes councils needed but so much can be done without any support.

As always ALDC and the LGA Lib Dems will be there to help you make the changes facilitated by Government. The next four years give us ample time to prove ourselves in the new freedoms that a government, in which our Ministers are key players, has given to us.

We are all on a steep learning curve but one that should for us be eminently satisfying.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Richard Kemp', written in a cursive style.

Cllr Richard Kemp
Leader LGA Liberal Democrats



www.libdemgroup.lga.gov.uk

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