



## The Coalition: Our Programme for Government on Communities and Local Government

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July 2010

ISBN: 978 1 4098 2513 5

# The Coalition: Our Programme for Government on Communities and Local Government

1. This document sets out the Government's response to the comments made by the public on *The Coalition: Our Programme for Government* and, specifically, the Communities and Local Government section of the coalition agreement.
2. We are grateful to 352 members of the public who took time to comment on this section of the agreement. It is not possible to respond to every comment. Therefore this document seeks to respond to the issues that raised the greatest level of comments and reflects the policies as they apply in England only.

## **The Government's response**

3. The Government's driving force is to decentralise power away from Whitehall and down to local people and communities. Services should be personalised to the individual and to individual neighbourhoods and this is something central government cannot do. At the same time we want to make councils more accountable to local people and give local communities control over housing, planning and other decisions. It means local authorities in turn listening to their residents and delivering what is asked by them.

## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT'S EFFICIENCY**

4. Local government has, comparable with the rest of the public sector, a good record in its efficiency and providing value for money. Nonetheless, we agree with those respondents who say that it is vital that local authorities do more to find savings and are more open about how they spend taxpayer's money.

5. As local authorities publish more performance and expenditure data and advertise all jobs online, taxpayers will be able to compare their authority's performance against others and decide if they are getting good value for money. What is more, we are working with local government to freeze Council Tax in England for at least one year, and seek to freeze it for a further year, and give new powers to local residents to veto high rises via local referendums.
6. The level of pay at the highest levels in local government is a concern to some respondents. While these decisions should be determined locally, we expect that there must be restraint in council senior pay and councillors' allowances. So we are working to increase transparency over salaries and allowances, and to ensure that councillors are more locally accountable for decisions over pay. What is more the [Fair Pay Review](#) currently being led by Will Hutton will be reviewing pay levels in local government and across the public sector to ensure that no public sector manager is paid more than 20 times the pay of the lowest-paid person in their organisation.
7. We recognise the concerns expressed about the structure of local government. It would appear at first glance to be complex and inefficient. However, creating unitary local government is expensive and disruptive and we do not believe that in the current financial circumstances this is the time to be imposing new local government structures. We have made clear that we want to see more service-sharing in local government. Examples exist, with councils sharing management teams or back office services such as IT, payroll and human resources. And in front line services, such as building control and benefit services.
8. More can be done, so we will be working with the Local Government Association to help local authorities find savings not only through sharing services, but also in more cost-effective procurement. We would welcome your ideas on how CLG and local government can make cost savings. Ideas can be sent to the [Spending Challenge](#) website.

## **THE ROLE OF FAITH COMMUNITIES**

9. However, for public services to be truly effective both central and local government need to place citizens and users at their heart. This means providing opportunities for local people to help design and create local solutions to local issues.
  
10. In response to the concerns expressed we acknowledge that faith communities make a vital contribution to national life. Across the country, Christians and followers of other religions are working hard to address problems in their communities. They have the buildings, experience, volunteers and “reach” that can put them at the very heart of service-delivery to many vulnerable groups. This, and their inter faith activity, is an important component of the Big Society we want to build, in which people work together for the common good and to tackle shared problems. Of course we want services to be offered equally to all people regardless of their faith. But we know that the vast majority of faith groups not only accept this, but fully embrace their role in helping to ensure the welfare of all in their local community.

## **AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

11. Government is committed to increasing the supply of affordable housing. We will give communities new powers to form housing trusts that will enable them to provide the homes they want, where they think it is most appropriate. We will provide incentives for local authorities to deliver sustainable development, including for new homes and businesses. And we are exploring a range of measures to bring empty homes into use.
  
12. Government has committed its support to those who aspire to own their own home through shared ownership schemes and helping social tenants and others to own/part-own their home and other measures.

## **We'll keep listening**

13. The Government is committed to engaging and collaborating with people online.

14. You're invited to have your say on how you think we can reshape how government works and cut public spending. We want your ideas and comments on the [Spending Challenge](#).

15. You can also take part in [Your Freedom](#) – and tell us which laws and regulations you want to see repealed.

## **Further Information**

16. You can find more about the Programme for Government:

- The comments made on the Communities and Local Government section of the coalition agreement:  
<http://programmeforgovernment.hmg.gov.uk/communities-and-local-government/>
- All government responses to the public's comments:  
<http://programmeforgovernment.hmg.gov.uk/response>
- The video response from Oliver Letwin, Minister of State at the Cabinet Office and Danny Alexander, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury:  
<http://programmeforgovernment.hmg.gov.uk/>

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