



The Government Response to the Councillors Commission

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July 2008

Product Code: 08LGSR05402/RCC

ISBN: 978-1-4098-0239-6

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Foreword

Local councillors are the champions of our local democracy. They are the people we should turn to when we want action to happen locally – from resolving issues around parking, to street lighting or bin collection. They are our voice when it comes to making local decisions on education or social services.

We should honour and respect their contribution. But it is right too that we should review their role. Our councillors may be our representatives but they don't always represent the full range of people in their local communities.

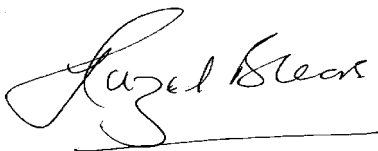
Those who work full-time or struggle with family responsibilities are far less likely to stand in council elections. Too few people from minority ethnic communities are represented and young people too rarely see the point.

That's why I welcome the report of the Councillors Commission and I am pleased we can take forward so many of its recommendations together with our partners in local government. I am very grateful to Dame Jane Roberts and to her colleagues on the Commission for their thoughtful work.

We are publishing our response alongside *Communities in control: real people, real power* precisely because we believe that councillors and local government are vital to encourage wider participation, involvement and leadership from every part of the community.

The practical action set out here – from more informative and interactive websites to remote voting and better support for councillors in their role – can go a long way not only to empower communities, but to revitalise grassroots local democracy.

Where necessary, we will legislate. But, in many cases, this is about local authorities following or adapting the good practice of the best. There is also an important role for the political parties. Together we can strengthen the role of councillors and make being a councillor a much more attractive role to people from all parts of our communities.



Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP
Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

The Government response to the Councillors Commission

1. We need effective and representative councillors at the heart of our councils. So we want more people to stand as councillors. And we want a more diverse range of people to come forward. Councils should be vibrant hubs of local democracy working in partnership with their communities.
2. *Strong and Prosperous Communities: The Local Government White Paper 2006* and the subsequent Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, set out the Government's commitment to developing the role of councillors as the democratically elected champions of local citizens.
3. Evidence shows that we are not currently unlocking the talent and ability in significant sections of the community:
 - just 1,400 (eight per cent) of nearly 20,000 councillors are aged under forty; and of these only around 330 are aged under thirty
 - only 29 per cent of councillors are women
 - around four per cent of councillors are from black and minority ethnic communities, when almost 10 per cent of the adult population is from a black and minority ethnic background¹
4. The 2006 White Paper established an independent Councillors Commission to review the incentives and barriers to people standing and serving as councillors. Chaired by Dame Jane Roberts, the Commission produced its report, *Representing the future*, in December 2007.²
5. We welcome the Commission's comprehensive and thoughtful report. It has stimulated an important debate, and we have subsequently received the views of many diverse stakeholders. Their views, and those submitted to the Commission, have informed this response.

¹ IDeA/LGA/LGAR (2007), *2006 National Census of Local Authority Councillors in England*, London: IDeA/LGA/LGAR.

² www.communities.gov.uk/councillorscommission/publications/representingthefuture/

Representing the future

6. The report considered what makes people want to become a councillor and stand for election. It found that:
 - local authorities are key in promoting local democratic engagement
 - local councillors are central to improving both representative and participatory democracy
 - being a councillor is a public service, and councillors should be from their communities, and not a separate political class
 - this is primarily a political and administrative issue for local government, but the Commission saw a supportive role for central government
 - political parties are the main gateway to people standing as councillors and local parties need to do more to encourage more representative councillors
7. Councillors serve on a range of different councils – counties, districts, unitaries, London boroughs and town and parish councils. The report considered the common barriers and incentives to standing as a councillor for all types of local authority.
8. Many Commission recommendations – particularly those relating to promoting and supporting councillors – were targeted at local government. We welcome these proposals and the Local Government Association (LGA) programme to address them, which started with a successful conference in February 2008. We are working with the LGA, Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA), and Leadership Centre for Local Government to encourage them to take recommendations forward.

9. Political parties play a significant role. It is important that they select talented and able councillors from all sections of the community. So we welcome the Local Government Association (LGA), Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) and Leadership Centre work with political parties to improve recruitment and candidate selection processes, and establish political group improvement boards to develop councillors' skills and leadership abilities.
10. The Commission report also makes proposals for electoral changes, including lowering the voting age. These wider issues are being considered as part of the follow-up to the *Governance of Britain Green Paper 2007*, and will be discussed for example by the Youth Citizenship Commission on which the Ministry of Justice takes a lead.
11. The Councillors Commission made 61 recommendations covering promotion and support for councillors, as well as structural and electoral issues. A summary of our responses to the recommendations is set out at the end of this document.

Promoting democracy

12. Local authorities should be confident about their political nature. The Commission was very clear that politics is an integral part of local government business.
13. Councillors are the elected champions of local people. But it is often difficult to find out what they do. It should be easier to find out more about local council leaders, their policies and what they've been doing on your behalf.
14. Evidence submitted to the Commission revealed unanimous support for the principle that local government should promote local democracy. The Commission's main recommendation was that this would be best delivered through a statutory duty on all principal local authorities to promote democracy.

15. Opinions diverged as to whether a statutory duty was necessary. Some felt it was not, as the more progressive authorities are already doing much in this area. However, others believed that a new duty would give such work a renewed emphasis and “remove any doubts that councils have the right and duty to promote local government and the role of the councillor”.³ A statutory duty is also supported by the National Association of Local Councils (NALC), the County Councils Network (CCN) and the Electoral Reform Society.
16. We will therefore take forward the Commission recommendation and introduce a statutory duty to promote democracy. This will build on the recent ‘duty to involve’, which requires local authorities to involve representatives of local citizens in policy development and delivery, and the Electoral Administration Act 2006 which expects councils to help improve electoral participation (**recommendation 1**).
17. The promotion of democracy is also at the heart of *Communities in control: real people, real power*, in which we recognise that more participation by individual citizens can reinforce, and be underpinned by, strong elected councils.
18. This new duty should have a real impact. So, we will encourage local authorities to take a range of actions as part of their new responsibility:
 - **better information:** council publications and websites should provide clear information about political control, council meetings, councillors’ surgeries and how to contact both councillors and local political parties
 - **a two-way process:** using local radio, blogs, podcasts and interactive websites to improve dialogue between councillors and local people
 - **empowering young people** with a more positive experience of voting through young mayors, the UK Youth Parliament, mock elections and school councils

³ Extract from the submission in response to the Councillors Commission report from Professor John Stewart, University of Birmingham, and Professor George Jones, London School of Economics.

- **getting people involved:** explaining to all communities how to be a councillor or take up other civic roles – including school governorships or health board membership – through websites and newsletters
- **practical support for councillors,** including allowing councillors to hold surgeries on council premises, and allowing all political parties to hire council premises for meetings and events
- **training frontline staff** so that they can answer simple questions from the public about the local democratic system. Callcentre staff, council tax, housing and planning officers all should know which political party controls the council, the date of the next elections, how to register and where to vote
- **promoting democracy:** Councils could involve staff or former councillors in promoting local democracy through programmes such as ‘Civic Champions’ or ‘Democracy Advocates’. This could involve:
 - ex-councillors becoming mentors for serving councillors
 - working with local schools, including initiating visits to explain their role and to support active citizenship education
 - making a positive presentation to local volunteer groups or boards about governance roles and how to apply
 - promoting the role of the council and councillor to community and voluntary groups
 - developing links with town and parish councils and supporting democracy activities
- **targeting:** co-ordinated targeting of groups not well represented among councillors (women, young people, people of working age, people from black and minority ethnic communities) to explain the role, time commitment and support available to help them take up civic roles
- **third sector:** Working with third sector organisations to ensure that active citizens in community and voluntary groups know about the opportunities to take up civic roles

- **liaising with local employers** to encourage support for staff members who have taken on a civic governance role

19. We would like local authorities to do more to encourage people to vote in local elections. Positive campaigns to encourage voter registration and voting can have a valuable impact. We will enable local authorities to offer incentives, such as entry in a free draw (perhaps with a leisure pass or shopping voucher as a prize). Of course, any incentives should not be construed as ‘paying for votes’ or create a major new financial burden on councils. But we believe the principle behind the Councillors Commission recommendation is right, and are therefore proposing to introduce a power that would allow local areas to take this forward if they wanted. We plan to do so in the forthcoming Community Empowerment, Housing and Economic Regeneration Bill (**recommendation 20**).

Giving help and encouragement to under-represented groups

20. Councillors are most effective when they have similar life experiences to their constituents. This is why it is so important to involve and attract people from all sections of the community.
21. The Commission suggested a number of approaches to improve representation from some currently under-represented groups. While we are sympathetic to the aim of the recommendations specifically focused on achieving equality (**recommendations 25-28**), we are not convinced of the desirability of setting councillor targets for local authorities. We believe that the most effective way to achieve change is through targeted local activities. We also believe that such activity has most benefit if linked to other civic activities, such as the existing Take Part framework.⁴ We plan to support Take Part local programmes to build skills, knowledge and confidence so that people, particularly those from more disadvantaged groups, have more opportunities to become civic activists, lay

⁴ Take Part is a national learning framework enabling colleges and other learning providers to develop programmes of citizenship learning to help adults gain the knowledge, skills and confidence they need to become empowered as members of their communities. See www.takepart.org.

governors and community leaders. These proposals are developed in the White Paper *Communities in control: real people, real power*.

22. The proposed duty to promote democracy will help local authorities to tackle under-representation. We expect good practice to be promoted by the Local Government Association (LGA), the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA). We are also working with the Audit Commission to consider how their new assessment system for local authorities can best consider how well a Council's leadership reflects their communities, within their review of council capability and capacity **(recommendation 29)**.
23. The Minister for Women and Equalities launched the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Women Councillors Taskforce in May. The Taskforce includes women leaders from the black and minority ethnic communities from across England, Wales and Scotland, who will take practical action to increase the number of women from black and minority ethnic communities standing as councillors **(recommendation 11)**.
24. The Minister for Women and Equalities also launched the *Women Take Part* campaign in autumn 2007, to identify ways to increase the number of women from under-represented groups in local decision making. The final report is due shortly.
25. Under the new Equality Bill, due to be introduced into Parliament, the Government intends to allow political parties to take a wider range of actions to encourage those from under-represented groups to become more active in both local and national politics.
26. We agree with the Commission about the need for good information to track improvement. We welcome the IDeA's commitment to continue their helpful census of councillors in England and to reinstate their survey of retiring councillors. We will consider how best to help the LGA and National Association of Local Councils (NALC) to establish a register of parish councillors **(recommendations 55 & 56)**.

Promoting the role of councillors

27. There is much that can be done locally to promote the role of councillors. The Local Government Association's (LGA) Reputation Campaign helps councillors and their councils to be seen locally in a positive light, and we welcome their commitment to promote it further (**recommendation 10**). A good regional example of such work is the London Councils 'be a councillor' campaign to recruit new councillors for the 2010 elections.⁵
28. However, local government remains confused about how far councils should promote and support councillors' activities. We want to clarify this, so that any guidance or advice recognises the legitimate support which should be given to councillors, including those with disabilities. We recognise that the *Code of Recommended Practice on Local Government Publicity* needs review. Wider consideration also needs to be given to which councillor activities are deemed party political or official, to make clear which activities the council can support. We will publish a formal consultation on changes to the publicity code and associated guidance later this year (**recommendations 12, 30 & 46**).
29. Councils and their officers should be confident about operating in a political environment and giving their elected councillors the support they require to represent their voters. We welcome Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) work to encourage best practice and develop training programmes for local government officers on the political nature of local government and the valid role of politicians and politics in the process of providing public services.
30. We support the Commission's call to raise the positive media profile of councillors. We welcome a recent public commitment from the BBC which said that it would take its coverage of national government and local government and turn it into the most engaging, the most creative multimedia portal for democracy in the world, using BBC Parliament and other television networks, radio, the web and mobile".

⁵ www.beacouncillor.org.uk

31. As the Councillors Commission report notes, Ofcom also has a responsibility periodically to review the fulfilment of the public service television broadcasting remit, which applies to the BBC, ITV1, Channel 4, FIVE and S4C. This remit specifically includes the provision of comprehensive and authoritative coverage of news and current affairs to facilitate civic understanding and fair and well-informed debate **(recommendations 8 & 9)**.

Confident councillors backed by effective councils

32. The Commission rightly recognised the need for councils to provide more effective support to councillors to enable them to carry out their role; and to organise council business in ways that make the best use of councillors' time.
33. People need to know exactly what their councillors do. Many authorities explicitly set out the role of councillors. We welcome the Improvement and Development Agency's (IDeA) commitment to develop model role descriptions which local authorities can adapt for their council. We expect National Association of Local Councils (NALC) to help develop similar role descriptions for parish councillors **(recommendation 5)**.
34. Most of the actions aimed at improving support to councillors and making the job more attractive to busy people are rightly being taken forward by the LGA, IDeA and the Leadership Centre as well as local authorities themselves. We welcome this **(recommendations 39, & 41-46)**. Our review of the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Government Publicity and associated guidance will also assist here **(recommendations 12, 30 & 46)**.

Making better use of new technologies

35. We want to enable councillors with caring responsibilities and those living far away from town halls to participate in council meetings and vote remotely. We will introduce legislation to support them in the forthcoming Community Empowerment Housing and Economic Regeneration Bill. We will make it legally possible for people to participate and vote in council meetings from their homes using new technologies. But changes would need to be balanced with measures

to preserve accountability and transparency, so that citizens can remain confident that they are being properly represented by their local councillor **(recommendation 40)**.

36. The Commission recognised the importance of direct contact between councillors and the public. It called on local authorities to assist councillors to be more visible and accessible in their localities – using the media, digital and social-networking technologies. The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Local Government also concluded that “councils need to develop the use of new media and, in particular, communication with local people through new media”.⁶
37. Some councils already promote the work of their councillors through well-supported councillor web pages, and the Local Government Association (LGA) and Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) do much to support councillor training in this area.
38. We also want to encourage councillors to use more types of media. Community radio, video on websites, blogs and podcasting are increasingly popular ways of reaching people, and can help councillors to maximise the impact of their communication. We will work with third sector partners to increase the use of these media **(recommendations 6 & 7)**.

Recognition by employers and the public

39. One reason why so few people become councillors is the worry that they won't be able to find the time to be a councillor and do their existing job. Employers often also believe the job more onerous than it is. They don't always recognise the developmental benefits of being a councillor.

⁶ Dungey, J., 2007, *All-Party Parliamentary Local Government Group. The Role of Councillors: Report of an Inquiry*. London: LGiU.

40. We want people to be able to become councillors and retain their existing jobs, and we share the Commission's belief that more should be done with employers to support staff who are serving as councillors. We will work with the LGA, IDeA, local government and employer organisations to produce an information pack for employers on civic roles, specifically stating both the time commitments and the benefits to both the employee and employer **(recommendations 48 & 49)**.
41. We agree that the skills and experience gained while serving as a councillor should be acknowledged and potentially accredited. Some schemes exist – including at Birkbeck College (University of London), Sunderland University and South Bank University. However we recognise a need for accreditation that does not necessarily require formal learning or teaching time, recognising different levels of experience and expertise. As the White Paper *Communities in control: real people, real power* makes clear, we will review current qualifications and modules and how they might be used or repackaged for councillors and those in lay governance roles **(recommendation 51)**.
42. We also believe that employers should seek to set out clearly the statutory position in relation to time-off for council duties in their human resources and staffing policies, so that their employees are properly informed. **(recommendation 47)**.
43. Councillors' work should be recognised in other ways too. National and local awards can acknowledge those who make a particularly good contribution. Councils should also consider awarding long serving or exceptional councillors the title of Alderman or Alderwoman, and we will (subject to parliamentary agreement) introduce new powers to allow the use of the new title of 'Alderwoman'.
44. We will also work with Business in the Community to consider how their new 'Community Mark' can give an incentive to more businesses to support their employees to undertake civic roles, including that of councillor.

45. We welcome the Leadership Centre's proposal to sponsor a Local Democracy Award scheme and the Improvement and Development Agency's (IDeA's) commitment to review existing awards (**recommendations 52 & 53**).

Youth engagement and citizenship

46. We welcome the Councillors Commission's emphasis on youth engagement, and their call to local authorities to engage meaningfully with young people. Such work should be seen as part of a council's Children and Young People's Plan. There is no need to create separate strategies.
47. Many young people are already involved in decisions affecting them, particularly through commitments set out in the *Ten Year Youth Strategy: Aiming High for Young People*. They are helping to decide how budgets for young people's activities are distributed in many local areas.
48. We want more young people to be engaged in their local community and have genuine influence on the design, commissioning and delivery of local services. As set out in *Communities in control: real people, real power*, we expect a major part of councils' work to fulfil their new duty to promote democracy will be about reaching young people. We welcome the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA's) commitment to work with the National Children's Bureau to produce suitable best practice case studies.
49. Young people should have more opportunities to participate in local decision-making. Young Mayors are a great way of doing this: they are already established in the London boroughs of Lewisham, Lambeth, Newham, Tower Hamlets and in Worthing Borough Council and Wyre District Council. We know that more authorities are actively looking at setting up a scheme.
50. In 2005, we established a system of 'Young Advisors' to create a pool of young people aged 16-21 trained to help public bodies, including Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and councils, in their policy making and service delivery. In the White Paper *Communities in control: real people, real power* we state our intention to make Young Advisors available in more local areas.

51. Internships with councillors were also supported by the Councillors Commission. The new National Institute of Youth Leadership being established by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) will be working with Communities and Local Government to develop and promote an internship programme. The department will also make it possible for young people to 'shadow' government ministers and other leading political figures including elected mayors. The IDeA have also committed to promote shadowing placements for young people (**recommendation 14**).
52. Young people will continue to cover the following topics relating to local democracy in the secondary school citizenship curriculum:
 - participating actively in different kinds of decision making and voting in order to influence public life
 - understanding and exploring the roles of citizens and Parliament in holding government and those in power to account
 - working individually and with others to negotiate, plan and take action on citizenship issues to try to influence others, bring about change or resist unwanted change, using time and resources appropriately
 - key features of parliamentary democracy and government in the constituent parts of the UK and at local level, including voting and elections
 - actions that individuals, groups and organisations can take to influence decisions affecting communities and the environment
 - work with a range of community partners, where possible, to address issues and problems in communities
53. We would expect citizenship lessons to cover the work of parish and town councils in areas where they exist.

54. At primary school level, Sir Jim Rose, former Deputy Chief Inspector of Schools, is chairing an independent review which will be looking at the position of citizenship education as part of the wider review of the whole curriculum. An interim report is due in October 2008, and the full report in March 2009 **(recommendation 13)**.
55. The Youth Citizenship Commission will report next year. It is currently considering what citizenship means to young people, how to increase their participation in politics, how to reflect the communication preferences of young people, how active citizenship can be encouraged; and whether the voting age should be lowered to 16 **(recommendations 15 & 16)**.

Widening the pool from local government itself

56. Many able local government employees have been unduly restricted from standing as councillors as their posts have been 'politically restricted'. We support the Councillors Commission proposal to relax the legislation so that council workers earning over a certain amount are no longer automatically prevented from being active in party politics and standing for election **(recommendation 23)**. We will amend the 'Widdicombe rules' so that only the most senior council officers continue to be barred from political activity along with those in other politically sensitive posts. We will of course retain the restrictions on council employees being councillors of their own local authority.

Enabling councils to set fair allowances

57. Councillors should be appropriately compensated for the time and costs of their role. Since 2003, members' allowances have been set by each local authority, having regard to the recommendations of its independent remuneration panel. This approach allows local flexibility and independence.
58. But it is important that panel decisions are informed by good practice elsewhere. So, we agree that they should have better information to help consistency and transparency in the setting of allowances. We welcome the Local Government Association's (LGA) proposal that it should collect and share data on average allowances, including those for carers **(recommendations 57 & 60)**.

59. Those who become an elected mayor, leader or executive member have a greater time commitment than ordinary councillors. These roles can become full-time positions and form a significant part of their income. We therefore recognise the short-term financial problems they might face if they lose their executive position after an election. This financial uncertainty may discourage talented people from taking on these roles. As such we will seek to introduce legislation which would enable authorities to follow recommendations of their independent panel, and introduce schemes for payments on loss of office after an election **(recommendation 54)**.
60. But public confidence requires citizens to be clear about what they can expect from their councillors. The indicative councillors role description being developed by the Local Government Association (LGA) and Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) will help by setting out what councillors should do. We welcome the LGA's commitment to develop guidance for its own political groups on such roles and the assessment of councillors' impact (recommendation 61).

Working with the Local Government Association

61. The LGA, IDeA and Leadership Centre are working with local authorities to take forward many of the Commission's recommendations. We look forward to working with them on these issues:
- raising awareness of councils and councillors, and what they do **(recommendations 1, 6, 7, 10 & 11)**
 - support for councillors' role as the link between a local authority and their communities **(recommendation 4)**
 - role descriptions for councillors **(recommendation 5)**
 - better engagement with young people **(recommendation 14)**
 - improved support and training for councillors and potential councillors **(recommendations 36, 39, 41 – 46)**
 - promoting the role to employers **(recommendations 48 & 49)**

- recognising and accrediting service at local and national level **(recommendations 51-53)**
- exit interviews and information on the profile of councillors **(recommendations 55 & 56)**
- developing better information which local remuneration panels can use to set allowances **(recommendation 57)**.

Working with exemplar councils

62. Long term change will depend on local government itself. Councils must lead the way. We welcome the Local Government Association (LGA), Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) and the Leadership Centre proposals to identify a number of local authorities to lead and champion change. The Leadership Centre will be leading this programme, working with the political leadership of nine authorities representing the three main parties.

Political parties

63. Over 90 per cent of councillors represent political parties.⁷ Each party needs to play its role in broadening the range of people who stand and serve as councillors. The black, asian and minority ethnic women councillors Taskforce will be exploring with all the main political parties how to encourage more women from black and minority ethnic communities to stand for election. The LGA and IDeA are also developing a good practice guide to attracting and recruiting new candidates; and with the Leadership Centre will work with the LGA's political groups to develop new materials and approaches **(recommendations 31-33 & 36-38)**.

Recommendations we will not be taking forward

64. There are a small number of recommendations that we will not be progressing.

⁷ IDeA/LGA/LGAR 2007. *2006 National Census of Local Authority Councillors in England*, London: IDeA/LGA/LGAR.

65. The Commission report suggested imposing multi-member wards and all-out elections on all local authorities. Parliament gave detailed consideration to all-out elections, and single or multiple member wards, during the passage of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. It allowed Councils to opt for all-out elections. Parliament also allowed local authorities to ask the Electoral Commission for a review to provide single-member wards or divisions, again enabling local discretion. We do not propose further legislation in these areas. And as most principal authorities already cover the costs of parish council elections, we believe that this too should remain a local decision **(recommendations 18 & 19)**.
66. We are not persuaded by the proposals for reserve councillors **(recommendation 17)** as an alternative to by-elections. This measure would limit people's right to choose their own representative. Similarly while we recognise the intention behind the recommendation to introduce term limits **(recommendation 22)** to encourage a greater turnover of long-standing councillors, we are not convinced that this is the best way to do so, a view shared by most people in our consultation. We believe local people should decide how long they want their councillors to serve.
67. Nor are we convinced that the Single Transferable Vote will improve the representation of all communities amongst the councillor population, as the Commission suggested **(recommendation 21)**.
68. The Commission made a number of recommendations in relation to state funding for political parties. The Government published a White Paper on the finance and expenditure of political parties on 16 June 2008. It concluded that, while enhanced state funding would be required in the event of a cap on maximum private donations, the absence of cross-party agreement and limited public support meant it should not be introduced now **(recommendations 34 & 35)**.
69. We are not persuaded that there would be sufficient benefit arising from a financial compensation scheme for employers whose employees become councillors. We believe this would create a significant administrative burden,

particularly for small firms. There would also be additional administrative costs for councils. The Commission's own research showed that such a scheme is "regarded as somewhat heavy-handed compared with persuading employers of the benefits of councillor-employees"⁸ **(recommendation 50)**.

70. The Councillors Commission recommended that pensions should be extended to all councillors. Most councillors can already join the Local Government Pension Scheme, at the discretion of their authority. We see no reason to alter this position because these decisions are best made at a local level **(recommendation 58)**.
71. The Councillors Commission also recommended altering the benefits system to remove perceived disincentives. Income Support and Incapacity Benefit, already offer a more generous 'disregard' for councillors than for other occupations and earnings.⁹ There is also a generous treatment of expenses incurred through a councillor's duties. We do not intend to alter the existing arrangements **(recommendation 59)**.
72. We agree that the public should be reassured that the very small number of cases of poor councillors' performance will be tackled. But we also believe that this is best managed through the ballot box and by political parties. Where the problem relates to a councillor's conduct, rather than performance, there is already a Model Code of Conduct (due to be reviewed this summer) which the Standards Board for England helps ensure is honoured **(recommendation 61)**.

Conclusion

73. In our fast-changing society we need councillors and local authorities to continue to lead and inspire their local communities. Together, *Strong and Prosperous Communities*: the Local Government White Paper 2006 and Local

⁸ Hands, D., Taylor, S., Featherstone, R. and Bovaird, T. 2007. *Research Report 2. Understanding the Barriers and Incentives to Becoming or Remaining a Councillor in England*, London: Communities and Local Government.

⁹ This is also true of the arrangements agreed for their replacement, the Employment and Support Allowance, which will come into force from October 2008 for new claims only.

Government and Public Involvement in Health Act, 2007, the Councillors Commission report, the White Paper *Communities in control: real people, real power* and the forthcoming Community Empowerment, Housing and Economic Regeneration Bill, set a clear and challenging agenda to help them to do so.

Summary of actions

Central government will be taking forward the following recommendations:

Recommendation:	Action:
1	Introduction of a statutory duty to promote democracy
11	Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Women Councillors Taskforce, led by the Minister for Women
6, 7	Working with third sector partners to improve communication between councillors and citizens
12, 30, 46	Revisions to the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Government Publicity and other guidance on support for official and non-official work by councillors, including disabled councillors
13, 14	Roll out of the new secondary level curriculum, and ongoing review of primary curriculum. Promoting to councils initiatives such as Youth Mayors, Young Advisors and internships with councillors
20	Enabling voting incentives. Legislative proposals to enable councils to offer incentives to vote
23	Revisions to the politically restricted posts legislation
29	Working with the Audit Commission on how Comprehensive Area Assessment can best consider how well a council's leadership reflects their communities
40	Legislation enabling remote attendance and voting at council meetings
51	A review of potential accreditation schemes
52	Promoting to councils the title of 'Alderman' and introduction of the new title of 'Alderman'. Promoting to councils the opportunity for ex-councillors to remain civically active by promoting democracy
54	Legislation to enable councils to offer loss of office payments to leaders and executives who lose their seats through a decision of the electorate
56	Working with Local Government Association and National Association of Local Councils to establish a register of parish and town councillors

The Youth Citizenship Commission is considering whether the voting age should be reduced (recommendations 15 and 16). We welcome the commitment to this agenda shown by the Local Government Association, Improvement and Development Agency and Leadership Centre, and we look forward to working in partnership with them in progressing the following recommendations:

Recommendation:	Action:
1, 6, 7, 10, 11	Raising awareness of councils and councillors, and what they do
4	Support for councillors' role as link between local authority and their communities
5	Role descriptions for councillors
14	Better engagement with young people
36, 39, 41 – 46	Improved support and training for councillors and potential councillors
48, 49	Promoting the role to employers
51, 52, 53	Recognising and accrediting service at local and national level
55, 56	Exit interviews and information on the profile of councillors
57	Developing better allowance information

Recommendations that are with local authorities to determine what is locally appropriate:

Recommendation:	Action:
18	All-out elections
19	Multi-member wards

We look forward to the action of stakeholders in taking forward the recommendations aimed at them:

Recommendation:	Action for:
8, 9	BBC & Ofcom
31-33, 36-38	Political parties
47	Employers

Publications, links and contacts

Publications

- *Communities in control: real people, real power*
www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/communitiesincontrol
- *Strong and Prosperous Communities: Local Government White Paper, 2006*
www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/strongprosperous
- Councillors Commission report *Representing the future*
www.communities.gov.uk/councillorscommission/publications/
- *Ten Year Youth Strategy: Aiming High for Young People*
<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/tenyearyouthstrategy>

Key organisations

- Local Government Association
Local Government House
Smith Square
London SW1P 3HZ
Tel 020 7664 3131
www.lga.gov.uk
- Improvement and Development Agency
Layden House
76-86 Turnmill Street
London EC1M 5LG
Tel 020 7296 6880
www.idea.gov.uk
- Leadership Centre for Local Government
Warwick House
25 Buckingham Palace Road
London SW1W 0PP
Tel 020 7630 2180
www.localleadership.gov.uk

Legislation

The Acts listed below are available via the Office of Public Sector Information.¹⁰ Sources for other legislation are indicated.

- Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity
[www.communities.gov.uk/publications/local government/code recommended](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/local%20government/code%20recommended)
- Electoral Administration Act 2006
- Local Government and Housing Act 1989
- Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007

Websites

- Take Part
www.takepart.org
- Be A Councillor
www.beacouncillor.org.uk

¹⁰ www.opsi.gov.uk

Submissions and comments

We invited views and formal submissions to inform the Government's response to the Councillors Commission report. We received responses from the following organisations and individuals:

Organisations

Association of North East Councils
Bar Association for Local Government & Public Service
Birmingham City Council
Buckinghamshire County Council
Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA)
Commission for Rural Communities
Community Democracy
County Councils Network
The Electoral Commission
Electoral Reform Society
Equality and Human Rights Commission
Hyndburn Borough Council
National Association of Local Councils
National Community Forum
National Council for Voluntary Organisations
National Youth Agency
Oxfordshire County Council Liberal Democrat Group
Salford City Council
South Tyneside Council
South West Local Government Association
Young Foundation

Individuals

Cllr Judith Blake, Paul Blomfield, Cllr Mahroof Hussain and Jane Thomas

Jim Brown, North Hertfordshire District Council

Cllr Keith Byatt

Cllr Antoinette Cooper, Epping Forest District Council

Cllr Kevin Hough, Withernsea Town Council

Professor George Jones, London School of Economics & Professor John Stewart,
University of Birmingham

Cllr Derek Pickup, Bristol City Council

Cllr Sue Proctor, Cheshire County Council

Cllr Mike Roberts, Rushmoor Borough Council

Cllr Graham Stokes, Wakefield Council

Don Tricker

Sir Robin Wales, Mayor of Newham

Cllr Sue Whittaker, Norfolk County Council

Adrian Young

ISBN: 978-1-4098-0239-6

ISBN 978-1-4098-0239-6



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