

## Sustainable Communities Act 2007

The Sustainable Communities Act became law on 23 October 2007. The Act sets up a new process where local communities and their local authorities (district, county and unitary councils) can guide policy and action to promote local sustainability and reverse community decline by proposing changes in legislation or budgets that currently only central government can influence.

The Act sets out the following:

- The Secretary of State should publish local spending reports, showing the scope of public spending by all bodies exercising public functions in the area.
- Local proposals from councils can be put forward to the Secretary of State, aimed at improving the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area including participation in civic and political activity.
- This can include proposals to transfer functions from one organisation to another.
- Councils should develop proposals through dialogue with wider community, using a panel or panels of local people.
- In developing proposals, councils should have regard to a range of sustainability issues such as local production of goods, local food, transport, energy use, and others.
- Local proposals are submitted via local authorities for short-listing by the Local Government Association representing the interests of local government, before being put to the Secretary of State for a response.
- The Secretary of State publishes an action plan setting out decisions on proposals,

Local authorities are currently the only bodies able to make these proposals the Act sets out that any proposals must be discussed with a panel of local representatives and consensus reached where possible. In Dorset it is proposed to use existing community planning groups as these panels for the purpose of the Act, with invitations to others to ensure the panels represent the wider community.

For proposals to be submitted in 2009 the process in Dorset will be as follows:

- In October Central Government issued an invitation, for local authorities to make proposals by 31 July 2009.
- Dorset local authorities have developed a joint approach with one deadline for submissions and a joint proposal form.
- The deadline for the submission of proposals is Thursday 30 April. Proposals must be submitted on the official form which will be available in the week commencing 16 March 2009 on [www.dorsetforyou.com/sustainablecommunitiesact](http://www.dorsetforyou.com/sustainablecommunitiesact) and hard copies will be available in council offices.
- Submissions will be checked against the requirement of the Sustainable, Communities Act – i.e. that for proposals to be considered by Central Government they must require a change at the national level before they can be implemented (e.g. a transfer of responsibilities from one public body to another, a change in legislation, a new national policy or a change or strengthening of policy).
- Proposals which do not meet the requirements of the Act will be fed into community planning processes within each local authority.
- Proposals will be discussed with the community planning groups (acting as panels) with the aim of reaching agreement on which proposals should be submitted to the Local Government Association (LGA) – submissions by local authorities to the LGA must be made by 31 July 2009, having been approved by the relevant council.
- Local authorities in Dorset will give timely feedback to those submitting proposals. This will cover:
  - Proposals being put forward to the LGA
  - Any proposals considered but not being put forward
  - Proposals that do not meet the requirements of the Act.

### **What happens next?**

- Following the submission of the proposals the LGA will reach agreement on the short list of proposals to submit to central government. No timescale has been issued on how long this will take.
- The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government will work with the LGA on the final shortlist of proposals and try to reach agreement on which of the proposals on the shortlist should be implemented and develop an action plan. No timescale has been given on this process.

### **Local Government Association Short-listing Criteria**

- Does the proposal require action from central government, or is it something that a local council or (other local partner body) could do anyway?
- How will it contribute to environmental, economic and/or social sustainability, (including participation in civic and political activity)?
- What will be the impact of the proposal, in terms of geographic area or population affected? Is it of very local significance or potential sub-regional impact? The LGA is likely to short-list small-scale as well as larger ideas, in keeping with the devolutionary intent of the Act.
- What legal issues might be involved? Do any local bodies (council, police, health, others) already have the necessary powers?
- If there are proposals for transfer of functions, what other bodies are affected? Have they been consulted?
- Have the Act's requirements for consultation with a community panel been met, and what evidence is there of local support for the proposal?

Source: <http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/core/page.do?pageld=1293641#contents-2>

### **Local Spending Reports**

Local Spending Reports are due to be published by central government by 22 April 2009. The Department of Communities and Local Government has issued a two stage consultation process:

Stage 1: Comments are requested by 3 April 2009 on the proposed arrangements for the Local Spending Reports for this first year.

Stage 2: Comments are requested by 15 May 2009 on the development of the Local Spending reports beyond the first reports.

We have set our timescale to allow for as much engagement and dialogue as possible but hope in future years the local spending reports will help inform proposals.

It is expected that this will not be a one off process however Central Government have not yet indicated if this will be an annual process.

### **For further information:**

Local Government Association: <http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/core/page.do?pageld=561616>

Department of Communities and Local Government:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/sustainablecommunitiesact>

Office of Public Sector Information:

[http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2007/pdf/ukpga\\_20070023\\_en.pdf](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2007/pdf/ukpga_20070023_en.pdf)

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