

Issue 7

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New government—new policy agenda

On 20 May the new coalition government published an expanded version of their coalition agreement setting out the national policy agenda for the next five years. The document promises a radical devolution of power to local communities including a general power of competence for councils, a review of local government finance and further phasing out of ring fenced grants for local projects to allow local priorities to dictate where money goes. Regional economic and spatial planning will be devolved to local areas and the national planning framework will be simplified to make it easier for developers to build new properties, developments and homes. The government will press ahead with plans to create directly elected mayors for the 12 largest Cities (including Liverpool) with responsibility for regeneration housing, planning, and possibly transport.

To support these ambitions, the government has issued a 'Building the Big Society' paper that outlines specific policy proposals for local communities to put more power and opportunity into people's hands. This will include: giving communities more powers over local services, encouraging more people to take an active role in their communities, transferring power from central to local government, supporting co-ops, mutuals, charities and social enterprises to have a greater role in running local services, and increase the amount of government data published.

There is also a commitment to reduce the level of inspection of the public sector across the board and to that end the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) regime has been brought to an end with immediate effect. Details as to what will replace CAA will become available, and it is expected that there will be a push for greater self-regulation to manage performance of local service delivery.

Following this, the queens speech set out the legislation to take forward the government's programme over the next 18 months and included 22 bills that will be taken through parliament in the near future. The programme includes a decentralism and localisation bill that will return economic, regeneration and spatial planning powers to local government, with the Regional Development Agency to be either abolished or scaled down. It will also give residents the right to take over local state-run services, instigate local referendums and veto council tax rises.

The following page sets out the government's agenda for specific local policy areas in more detail .



Local innovation award

The Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service, has been recognised with a “Bright ideas: taking control of care” award, for their ‘Ministry of Food’ project’, as part of the Local Innovation Award Scheme.

The focus of the project was on a pilot intake of 15 students with low level learning disabilities who learned how to cook a meal from scratch. The students then learned how to teach other to cook and live healthier lifestyles.



Policing and community safety

Following the formation of the new coalition government, changes can be expected within the crime and disorder agenda, both in terms of ethos and practical measures. The Home Secretary’s first statements have set the tone for the government’s crime and disorder agenda with a focus on ‘rolling back the state’ to give more power to local people, and reducing bureaucracy. Practically, this translates as an intention to introduce directly elected individuals to hold the police to account, providing new licensing powers to tackle alcohol-related crime, protecting civil liberties (e.g. regulating CCTV), and reducing police paperwork. The legislative programme set out in the Queens Speech takes forward these policies. A police reform and social responsibility bill, due to be introduced to parliament later this year, will put in place the overhaul of the Licensing Act as well as provide the legal framework for introducing directly elected policing officials.

For more information go to www.homeoffice.gov.uk

Social care and health

The government has stated that urgent reform of the social care system is needed to provide more control to individuals and their carers, and to ease the cost burden that they and their families face. An independent commission will be established to consider how responsible and sustainable funding for long-term care can be achieved. It will ensure that there is a fair partnership between the state and the individual, which takes into account the vital role of families and carers. In terms of health, an independent NHS Board will be established to allocate resources and provide commissioning guidance, and to allow GPs to commission services on behalf of their patients.

For more information go to www.dh.gov.uk

Children and young people

The government has announced a fundamental reform of the school system to tackle educational inequality and give greater powers to parents and pupils. The coalition agreement sets out plans to overhaul the schools system by enabling all schools to become academies that are independent from local authorities, and allow schools to be started up and run by parents, teachers and communities. An academies bill has been introduced to make this possible and an invitation to apply for academy status has already been issued to all schools. It has also been announced that schools will be given greater freedoms from bureaucracy with a reformed inspection framework, a slimmer curriculum, and the ability to offer International GCSE (iGCSE) qualifications in key subjects. For children and family services, free nursery care will be supported whilst Sure Start will be refocused towards helping the neediest families through early intervention, potentially including a payment by results financing scheme.

For more information go to www.education.gov.uk

Total Place

Total Place is a national initiative aimed at understanding how a “whole-area” approach to public services can lead to better outcomes at less cost. Thirteen pilot sites across the country have been experimenting by counting the total public sector spending in each area, and focussing on an important local priority - the ‘deep dive’ – in which to map resources spent locally and to track the effectiveness of current provision. Total Place was a Labour led initiative and although it is likely to be rebranded by the coalition government the principles will remain. Local Government Minister Bob Neill said “whatever we call the next generation of Total Place, it has to be about outcomes. The challenge now isn’t about talking but about delivery on the ground.”

For more information go to www.localleadership.gov.uk/totalplace



Equality Act 2010

On 8 April 2010 the Equality Act was passed by parliament. The act provides a single set of equality rules, combining existing equality legislation, using simplified language. Many principles will remain the same, but the scope of discrimination law will be widened and reinterpreted in several key areas. A key issue in the act is bringing together existing public sector discrimination duties covering, gender, disability and race; extending it to cover age, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, and religion/belief. In many but not all instances, marriage and civil partnerships. Other new duties cover employment and service deliverer, including explicit protection from discrimination for pregnancy and maternity, narrowing gender pay gap, procurement and marital status including civil partnerships. Most of the provisions in the act will come into force in October, with the implementation of some provisions being delayed until next year to allow organisations across the public and private sectors time to prepare.

For more information go to www.parliament.gov.uk

LSP sign up to the Compact

A re-launch of the Compact agreement is set to establish greater co-operation between local agencies and voluntary groups. On the 27 May the LSP board made a commitment to uphold and implement the St.Helens Compact. The Compact is an agreement set out between the statutory sectors and voluntary, community, faith and voluntary sports sectors that want to work collaboratively to benefit St.Helens. The key principles behind the Compact are respecting the contribution all groups make, understanding constraints of groups and recognising everyone’s role to better services. By signing up to the Compact we will see improved communications with each other, a better understanding and respect between sectors, a more effective way of working together and mutual benefit and advantage. All groups will work together more successfully to benefit the people of St.Helens.

For more information go to www.sthelens.gov.uk

Local Transport Plan 3

The third Local Transport Plan will play a key role in helping Merseyside achieve its vision of becoming a thriving international city region by 2030. Stakeholder and public consultation on the plan took place during March and April to gain initial views on how transport should improve in the long term. The responses are now being collated and turned into preferred options. Further consultation will take place in September asking for views on the options.



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If you would like this briefing in another format please contact the Policy Watch team.

St.Helens Together Policy Watch is a quarterly newsletter to keep local strategic partners and community members up to date with national and local policy initiatives.

We will provide the latest information for each of the LSPs thematic groups. If you have any questions or want to contribute to Policy Watch you can contact us using the email address on the left.

Economic development and enterprise

Children and young people

Healthier communities and older people

Communities and neighbourhoods

Safer communities

Partnership performance summary

The Partnership Performance Management Report (PPMR) for the final quarter of 2009/10 was published in May this year. Performance of the local area agreement (LAA) performance indicators (PIs) is summarised in the table below:

LAA Pis in Q4 as at end of March 2010	Number of Pis	Number on or exceeding target	% on or exceeding target	Number worse than target
Children and Young People	19	13	68.4%	6
Communities and Neighbourhoods	16	9	56.3%	7
Economic Development and Enterprise	5	1	20%	4
Healthier Communities and Older People	7	4	57.1%	3
Safer Communities	6	4	66.7%	2
Total	53	31	58.5%	22

Significant improvements have been made in a number of key areas including:

- Reduced crime and local concerns about drugs and alcohol
- Healthier living including stop smoking services

However, further work is needed to ensure the borough makes a strong and swift recovery following the recession, that health inequalities continue to decrease and that rates of teenage pregnancy fall.