

Voluntary**Action**Islington

Policy Briefing - Decentralisation and Localism Bill

March 2011

Key points for the voluntary and community sector in Islington:

- Community right to challenge councils on provision of services
- New powers of “general competence” to local authorities
- Right for communities to bid for assets of community value
- Increased provisions to encourage local referenda

Community Right to Challenge

This provision allows communities, effectively charities, to submit an “expression of interest” to the council to provide, or partner to provide, a service the council currently runs. There must be a formal process by which organisations can challenge the service and make a proposal to run it themselves.

Councils must consider the challenge based on its potential to improve social, economic or environmental wellbeing.

One very important point: If the challenge is accepted the council must enter a procurement exercise which is open to any organisation. This means an alternative group or private sector organisation could be awarded the contract.

For voluntary and community groups already providing services on behalf of the council, they can be challenged themselves. Therefore, while there may be opportunities there are also considerable threats to voluntary and community organisations in this new provision.

New powers to councils

A “general power of competence” replaces central government agreed targets such as the Comprehensive Area Assessment. Local Authorities will be able to do anything that is in the interests of residents as long as it is legal.

This emphasises the need for strong partnerships with the voluntary and community sector in order to have a strategic overview of need. Local Compacts may be more important as a basis for the relationship between the sector and the Local Authority.

Assets of Community Value

Local Authorities will have to maintain a list of assets in the Borough which have been assessed to have community value. Communities will be able to nominate assets to be included on the list.

The aim is to secure in community ownership assets which have social value and to provide a window of opportunity for community groups to put a viable bid together to purchase and manage the asset.

Local Referenda

This provision allows for the holding of a local referendum if a petition is signed by more than five percent of electors. However this is not absolute and councils can quash vexatious or abusive petitions.

Voluntary **Action** Islington

Residents will also be able to vote on development issues, increasing control over the nature of local planning. Groups can also propose new developments, and with over fifty percent of voter support, these can be built without planning permission.

A key issue for the voluntary and community sector will be to ensure that referenda and developments do not threaten the services and interests of marginalised groups. The aim of localism should be to benefit the community as a whole.

For more information:

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

For questions or comments please contact:

Duncan McLaggan
Project Officer – Policy and Networks
Voluntary Action Islington
P: 0207 832 5829
E: duncan.mclaggan@vai.org.uk