



BRIEFING

‘Vibrant Local Leadership’

This discussion document accompanies ‘Sustainable Communities; People, Places and Prosperity’ part of a five year plan from the ODPM. It provides more detail on the action Government believes is needed to achieve its vision of a leadership role for local authorities: *‘strong self-confident local government which leads communities and enables quality services’*.

Government believes that as the “only organisation that represents all the people living in its area”, Local Authorities have democratic accountability and can bring together the people who live in their area. Leadership at the strategic and local level should be at the centre of every council’s role. Effective leadership across the whole of council areas need more clear and visible structures, better public understanding and greater public scrutiny. At the local level the priority is to strengthen the role of councillors as champions and advocates of the communities that they represent

However, *“the failure to maximise the potential of locally elected representatives to act in a leadership role as advocates and champions of local communities is a major obstacle to our ambitions”*. Key challenges include:

- Low levels of confidence and trust in some Local Authorities,
- The idea that local councillors are *‘out of touch’*,
- A lack of *“able and representative”* people wanting to become councillors
- That many representatives do not reflect their diverse communities.

Recent efforts to promote the local leadership role of Local Authorities and encourage them to be more responsive to their communities have included Local Strategic Partnerships, the Local Government Act, new constitutions for councils and the launch of a Government Leadership Centre.

Government will now create a statutory framework for effective local leadership, setting out steps to improve the supply, capability and effectiveness of future leaders. This will be achieved by making the roles of local councillors more clear and attractive and encouraging a wider variety of people to become involved.

Attracting and retaining future leaders who reflect their communities could involve;

- *“Attracting more women and more people from a range of diverse backgrounds” and having “a representative group across the age spectrum”*
- *Taking steps to “make it easier for more people to take time out from their careers to play one of the senior, locality wide leadership roles”*
- *Making it easier to “combine work and caring responsibilities”*
- *Exploring whether “the interaction of the Benefits System with Councillor Allowances...acts as a disincentive to office to those in receipt of benefit”*

The Local Government Capacity Building Fund controlled by the Government and the Local Government Association aims to offer development opportunities for Councillors. A skills framework identifying the skills needed for councillors to lead is also being developed.

The problems of attracting diverse public sector senior officers with experience of service delivery, professional skills, managerial excellence and organisational leadership are also addressed. Suggestions for attracting talent and building capacity include encouraging managers from outside Local Authorities and promoting the benefits of public sector careers more positively.

The document aims to encourage debate about how to encourage vibrant and effective local leadership.

Further details and the full document can be found at www.odpm.gov.uk

Urban Forum, April 2005