

# **Sustainable Communities Act 2007**

An introduction to the Act

How the Act's process will work

The LGA's role as the 'The Selector'

Local Spending Reports

How the Act might link with other work which is being done locally

# Where did the Sustainable Communities Act come from?

New legislation, originally a Private Member's Bill

Bill developed by Local Futures coalition

About sixty councils actively supported the Bill

Became law in autumn 2007

# What is the Sustainable Communities Act

Provides a new framework for councils to put forward proposals for change

Encourages people to identify what is needed for more sustainable communities locally, requiring changes to be made nationally

Links in with the 'empowerment' agenda – as the government seeks to encourage people to engage with their local communities, giving greater influence on decisions affecting them

# What do we mean by ‘sustainability’

- The Local Government White Paper states that for a local authority to be sustainable, it should respect five principles:
  - Living within environmental limits
  - A strong, healthy and just society
  - Achieving a sustainable economy
  - Promoting good governance
  - Using sound and responsible science

# The 'Sustainability of local communities' is defined..

- Encouraging the improvement of the economic, social or environmental well-being of the authority or part of its area
- 'Social well-being includes participation in civic and political activity

# How it works: 1

- Secretary of State invites proposals from councils to improve the sustainability of local communities
- First invitation was issued October 2008 – first round deadline end of July 2009
- Secretary of State to publish Local Spending Reports April 2009

## How it works: 2

- All proposals made via Local Authorities (on-line) to the Local Government Association (the 'Selector') - will not require substantial business cases.
- LAs must involve a panel of local people and consult on proposals
- Proposals can involve a transfer of function, and changed uses for public spending
- Proposals require government to act: ie. changes to law, government policy, public spending patterns, and/or transfer of functions to a different body

## How it works: 3

- The LGA has been appointed as the Selector
- The Selector must consider and shortlist proposals (in co-operation with the Secretary of State) and try and reach agreement
- Secretary of State must publish an 'Action Plan' on implementing approved proposals and report annually to parliament on progress
- May become a regular cycle (but may not happen every year)

# Local Spending Reports

- Intended to provide information on ALL public sector spending in an area
- Contextual information for proposals on alternative spending patterns, transfers of functions
- Will be based on council boundaries
- Likely to be a web-based publication

## **What councils might gain from the Act**

- A new way to raise issues with local communities, and extend existing work being undertaken
- An opportunity to lobby to remove barriers to sustainability and well-being
- Open up debate on public spending and transfer of functions
- A chance for councils to develop new ideas, and learn what others are doing

# Discussion

## Criteria:

- Must require some sort of action from Central government
- Must promote sustainability
- Establish or identify a panel(s) of local people & reach agreement on merits of proposals
- Consult those parties concerned involving transfers of responsibility of public bodies
- Make formal decision (via full council or cabinet)
- Regard for 'powers of well-being' – 'power of first resort'