

ROYAL BOROUGH OF WINDSOR AND MAIDENHEAD

PARISH CONFERENCE

16 February 2010

1. Empowerment - background

Less than 5% of spend per head (public funding) in an area is democratically controlled.

2. Empowerment - introduction

December 2008 - The Government White Paper, 'Communities in Control: Real People, Real Power', was introduced into Parliament as the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill 2008.

The Bill sought to:

1. create greater opportunities for community and individual involvement in local decision-making
2. to put community involvement at the heart of everything councils and their partners do
3. recognise that there are real benefits to be gained from engaging and empowering communities.

It emphasises a further shift away from individuals as passive users of services and information to active participants in determining what's best for their communities.

Statutory organisations already have a formal 'duty to involve' local communities in developments that affect them (Public Involvement in Health Act 2007).

3. Empowerment - what does it mean?

Community Empowerment is about motivated people actively engaged in making a difference to the places they know best.

- it's about "shifting power, influence and responsibility away from existing centres of power and into the hands of communities and individual citizens"
- it is about re-energising communities and building on their desire to participate when it counts
- convincing local people that making a difference is both possible and worth it.

4. Empowerment - What are the benefits?

Community empowerment can strengthen the local democratic process and when residents work together to solve local problems, stronger interactions between people are created which can help change perceptions and improve the sense of belonging to the local area.

Involving local people as much as possible in the decisions that shape their communities also ensures that services are better suited to local needs.

5. Empowerment – what next?

Parish Councils are the first tier of local government and deliver a range of important services at a community level.

The Council is keen to gauge your views on the services that Parishes could feasibly take responsibility for at a very local level under the spirit of the Act. An example of this could be the cutting of grass on verges.