

Unlocking the Talent of our Communities

A pre-White Paper consultation

The Department for Communities and Local Government, DCLG, has been undertaking a brief consultation prior to the launch of a White Paper later this year on

“unlocking the talents of our local communities”

The main themes under consideration in this, one of a series of consultations around community empowerment, are

- Regeneration and promoting work and enterprise
- Working neighbourhoods fund
- Encouraging active citizenship and reviving civic society and local democracy
- Improving public services
- Strengthening local accountability

Cheshire Community Action, formerly Cheshire Community Council, is a local charity dedicated to helping you develop your local communities through self-help, encouragement and support.

We are committed to providing funding advice and support for projects which will protect and enhance the communities of Cheshire, Warrington and Halton, building strong and active communities.

Established in 1930.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Cheshire Community Action (formerly Cheshire Community Council)

The paper mentions the *National Strategy Action Plan: A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal* which was launched in 2001 to give a vision that in 10 to 20 years, no-one should be seriously disadvantaged by where they live.

The Government is also launching a *Homes and Communities Agency* to improve the co-ordination of housing and regeneration in areas.

Government believes that effective regeneration relies on active participation and engagement of local people and communities, not just the articulate and organised. It wants to encourage the broad majority of residents and groups traditionally excluded from the consultation process.

There is a continuing move towards tailoring services to the needs of individuals and giving them more choice in the process and a desire for more local influencing of decisions.

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A Perspective from Cheshire Community Action

The prospect that no-one should be disadvantaged by where they live is an excellent and admirable one. This would have the potential to turn the tables on the increasing rural isolation felt in the communities of Cheshire and Warrington, help to halt the reduction in service delivery and give people choice in their service provider.

Rural services cost more to deliver, having a higher unit cost. A danger is that by “mainstreaming” rural into general targets, statutory agencies could be delivering to their targets of 85% or 90%, but those citizens that do not receive support become the same every time, thus seriously creating serious inequalities in our sub-region.

Regeneration in rural areas could be one positive step on the path. It could help to increase the economic prosperity of an area, develop new jobs and act as a catalyst for services such as rural transport to be developed or reinstated. The current trend to convert barns and farm buildings to residential sites rather than centres of enterprise could undermine this regeneration, an area for consideration by local planners.

Regeneration needs to be coupled with affordable housing, to allow people to grow up and continue to live in our rural areas, continuing to build a sense of community and social or family responsibility. The city regions are identified as a drain on our communities, as people work and spend their money in the cities, then come back to enjoy a “rural idyll”. This undermines local economies, local voluntary and community activity and increases house prices effectively pricing local people out of the area.

Could one of the best means of coordinating social, economic and physical regeneration be to give local people the opportunity to co-ordinate budgets, to have a say in their future? Within active communities, such as those who have created Parish Plans, they are already demonstrating their commitment. A move to more participatory budgeting, local people setting the spending priorities for their area, could be an excellent starting point to demonstrate that community activity is supported and that local people can improve their local surroundings.

Community Champions could help to lead this process provided it is not anticipated that they are only to be local Councillors, nor that all local Councillors are of the calibre to be champions. A bottom up approach, supported by trained community workers, could help to co-ordinate regeneration within our rural communities provided statutory agencies and others are prepared to pool budgets behind them and are given the flexibility by national government to do so.

Alison Roylance-White,
Chief Executive

Add your thoughts or view the main briefing on the DCLG website
www.communities.gov.uk/news/corporate/729418

E&OE 08. This briefing sheet forms some of the opinions of members, staff, volunteers and/or Directors of Cheshire Community Action. It is one view from a rural perspective and is not intended to be the sole view, replacing others. Please take an active approach and be a direct part of the consultation process

