

A new political landscape an opportunity for a new approach to local government

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This week, the national political and policy landscape for the UK has changed, as demonstrated by the sight of David Cameron sharing a press conference podium with Nick Clegg. However, this changed political and policy landscape applies to UK Local Governance as well.

There are significant opportunities for local politicians and leaders to move swiftly to enable the coalition in parliament to build a new balance of power between local and central government. This needs to both reflect the emergent national political agenda and engage citizens and localities in a renewal of our commitment to local democracy.

Today I think every local council in the country needs to be asking themselves the following questions:

- What changes are needed so that local councils are seen as local democratic political institutions rather than the delivery arm for central government policy at local level?
- How can we ensure that local leadership is exercised by a wide range of people through a variety of different processes with the local authority being the unifying and representative local parliament?
- How can Local Councillors be granted real political power to represent their constituents and to influence the strategic direction of local policy and services?
- What opportunities lie within the 'new localism' for political power to grow up from citizen to government with political decision-making resting at institutional points as close as possible to citizens and local communities?
- What changes are needed to transfer significant legislative powers to local government so that they can truly represent the views of local individuals, communities and citizens and translate their aspirations into effective service delivery outcomes?
- Should Local Governments be able to raise locally democratically accountable taxes such as a local income tax?
- What immediate steps can be taken for Local Governments to embrace place shaping as the central aspect of their political and strategic roles?
- How can we replace the fear of a 'post-code lottery' with the assertion of a 'post-code democracy' which recognises and responds positively to the diversity of different localities and communities by encouraging the development of policy and service delivery solutions which reflect local circumstances and preferences?
- How can upper tier councils move to engage councils representing smaller geographical areas (e.g. parishes, towns, districts) with real and substantial powers that would enable people and communities to reconnect with their Councillors and their Local Government?
- Can we make the central-local concordat a force for change by implementing it in spirit as well as to the letter?

These questions provide a creative agenda for re-invigorating local government and local democracy in the context of the changed politics represented by the formation of a national Conservative – Liberal Democrat coalition government.

These questions are all drawn from INLOGOV's written evidence to the parliamentary select committee on the balance of power between central and local government.

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