

By: Paul Carter, Leader of the County Council  
To: Cabinet – 17 March 2008  
Subject: Consultation on Local Petitions and Call for Action  
Classification: Unrestricted

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Summary: A response is required to the Consultation document on Local Petitions and Call for Action. A suggested draft response has been formulated by a cross party IMG to assist the Cabinet with formulating their response.

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## Introduction

1. (1) The Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has published a consultation document "Local Petitions and Calls for Action". The consultation document raises the following consultation questions and invites responses by 20 March 2008 (a copy of the consultation document is attached at Appendix 2).

### *Petitions*

- (a) The Government believes there should be a statutory duty on local authorities to respond to local petitions. What conditions must be met before a local authority is required to respond formally to a petition? (*Paragraph 19*)
- (b) In particular, how should we define the level of support required before a petition must get a formal, substantive response?
  - By a fixed number of signatures
  - By a percentage of the electorate in the area?
  - By a hybrid of the two?
  - or in some other way (*paragraph 25*)

### *Calls for Action*

- (c) What if any matters should be excluded from the call for action? (*Paragraph 40*)
- (d) What guidance should Government provide on the operation of the councillor call for action? (*Paragraph 41*)

### *Overall*

- (e) Taken together, would petitions and calls for action sufficiently empower communities to intervene with their elected representatives? Should we contemplate other measures? (Paragraph 43)
- (f) Do you have other views on the operation of the new duty to respond to petitions and the call for action?

### **IMG on Local Petitions and Call for Action**

2. (1) In order to assist the Cabinet to formulate a response to this consultation the Corporate Policy Overview Committee at its meeting on 25 January 2008 agreed to establish an IMG to discuss the consultation document and to formulate a draft response.

(2) The IMG under the chairmanship of Mr M Angell met on 20 February 2008. The Membership of the IMG is Mr M Angell, Mrs A Allen, Mrs T Dean, Mr R Parker and Mrs P Stockell.

(3) The IMG were assisted in their consideration of the document by a briefing note produced by the Corporate Policy Unit.

(4) Attached as Appendix 1 are the comments/suggested draft response from the IMG on the consultation.

### **Recommendations.**

3. The Cabinet is invited to agree a response to the Consultation on Local Petitions and Call for Action for submission to the DCLG by 20 March 2008

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Background Information: *Include ALL background information taken into account in preparing the report. (This does not include previous Committee Reports)*

**Possible text for a draft response to the CMLG consultation “Local Petitions and Calls for Action”**

The following six questions, shown in **bold**, are the issues on which CLG are seeking views. Set out below each question are the comments of the IMG on Local Petition and Calls for Action which met on 20 February 2008, those *in italics* come from the briefing note produced by the Corporate Policy Unit.

**1. What conditions must be met before a local authority is required to respond formally to a petition?**

- The guidelines must define what the definition of “response” to a petition would be.
- The guidance should also set out a timeframe for dealing with Petitions. The County Council would like to see the same as the Freedom of Information Act namely 28 days.
- *There is also something to be said for a ‘light touch’ response to petitions, unless they are self-evidently frivolous or vexatious, so that the Council is recognised as being responsive to petitions rather than unnecessarily bureaucratic.*

**The subject of the petition (paras 20 – 22)**

- *The conditions suggested here seem very broad brush – principal authorities like KCC could find themselves, if these conditions are not carefully worded, fielding petitions on issues where KCC is a minor or subsidiary partner.*
- *It will be important to find the right balance between principal authorities, in responding to petitions, being empowered to influence its partners’ priorities and activities and their merely becoming a convenient proxy target for a more generalised public dissatisfaction.*
- In relation to certain partnerships which had no “controlling mind” for example, the Kent Partnership Board any petition address to them as a whole should be passed to the appropriate partner(s) via the Board.

**Petition organised by local person (paras 23 – 24)**

- *Clearly, if the intention for encouraging petitioning is primarily to restore participation in local democracy, then petitions must have a local originator. With this in mind, the proposition set out in para 23 (i.e. a local organiser “invoking the help of a national organisation with wider interests”) may prompt a very adverse if unintended consequence. That is to say, it is not inconceivable that some well-resourced, national single-issue organisations could coordinate activities for local supporters – in effect, local petitioning gets hijacked for non-local lobbying purposes by non-local and possibly vested interests. There is also the very real risk of inequity because it is difficult to see how local hard-to-reach, marginalised*

*or seldom-heard groups or communities could participate on a level playing field and garner similar support or resources.*

- *Of the three options in paragraph 23, “local person” may best be defined in option (b) – any adult who lives or works in the area at the time the petition is submitted. This could be improved by replacing “adult” with “person”, leaving it to local discretion about allowing petitions organised by young people, as indicated in paragraph 24.*
- In relation to the issue of a “local person” mention was made of the situation where a student may go to University in Canterbury but live in London and therefore the definition of “local person” could include a person in education within the area.
- The difficulty of including young people under 18 within the definition of “local person” was raised. Although Members recognised the importance of including this group within those that could be involved with a petition, if support was measured by using the electoral roll, their participation would not be recognised.

**2. In particular, how should we define the level of support required before a petition must get a formal, substantive response? (para 25)**

- It was pointed out that if certain number or percentage of electorate was set for the level of support required for a petition, this may exclude some local issues which only involved a small number of people, for example issues involving a very small area or a specific care home. A more inclusive way of doing this could be to specify that there should be a certain percentage of the potential electorate for the area that the issues related to.
- There was agreement that if a level of support was specified for a petition it should be set as low as possible, if it was set too high it would rule out a lot of petitions on local issues.
- It was suggested that local authorities should be left with the freedom to decide an appropriate level of support for their area and/or specific situations.
- *Thresholds could be subject to local consultation, over and above any prescribed national minimum. A hybrid of percentages and absolute figures could be a way of being able to encompass both the very localised issues and the pan-Kent issues that could be legitimate subjects for petitions.*

### **Signatures (paras 26 – 29)**

- Members expressed concern about the use of e-petitions with electronic signatures. It was emphasised that if these were used there should be a robust process for verification.
- *The trend towards electronic signatures should be encouraged with regard to e-petitions if it can be shown to promote participation in local democracy by groups who might not otherwise participate, i.e. it is an additional, not a replacement, method. It is also important to remember that the electronic voting pilots in English elections have identified a number of technical problems and fraud risks so further piloting seems desirable before it can be assured that this is safe and reliable.*
- *Similarly, with regard to signatures by children, this is another area for some interesting pilot studies and reviewing findings before jumping to conclusions one way or the other.*
- *It might be worth considering whether it is sufficient to ask for a person's postcode of their place of residence or work. Postcodes are GIS mappable so petitions could be spatially analysable – another useful piece of customer intelligence. Providing a full address gives only a spurious assurance of authenticity (and one must ask whether there would be sufficient resources to check line by line for accuracy or honesty).*

### **Petitions – minimum requirements (paras 30 – 32)**

- *While endorsing the general tenor of these paragraphs, it again seems advisable to have the minimum of central prescription – local councils should be encouraged to develop local enhancements of national (very) minimum requirements through their own local consultative processes. The inclusion of a general duty as mentioned in paragraph 31 would have the benefit of removing much of the need for central direction, petitions should be taken at face value.*

### **3. What if any matters should be excluded from the call for action? (para 40)**

- It was agreed that the following should be excluded:-
  - quasi-judicial matters.
  - Specific matters identified by Directorates as needing to be excluded.
  - matters of individual conscience.
  - Matters which are already subject to a statutory procedure which has Member involvement such as school closures.
  - Matters which will be dealt with in accordance with another process or mechanism for example complaints procedures.

**4. What guidance should Government provide for the operation of the councillor call for action? (para 41)**

- It is important that Councils have a clear laid down process for dealing with Calls for Action.
- *Guidance should require that there be local arrangements and that the arrangements to be put in place locally are left to local discretion, wherever possible, and in consultation with local partners and electorates.*

**5. Taken together, would petitions and calls for action sufficiently empower communities to intervene with their elected representatives? Should we contemplate other measures? (para 43)**

- A view was expressed that a petition was one of the weakest ways of empowering a community. A stronger way would be to establish Parish councils across both rural and urban areas which would give a local level of involvement that people could easily relate to. In relation to Call for Action Members generally believed that this role was already being carried out by most Councillors in an informal way and was often the next stage on from a petition.
- *There seems considerable sense in henceforth seeing the new petition proposals performing the function of the Community Call for Action (CCfA) (as it was originally portrayed in the 2006 Local Government White Paper and more recently in the 2007 "Governance of Britain" Green paper).*
- *The earlier CCfA proposals had some legally-binding consequences (e.g. re-letting the contracts for failing local services) which have now been dropped. It may be worth mentioning the lack of this dimension in the current legislation, in the context of feedback from the Corporate Assessment inspectors, about the benefits of strengthening overview and scrutiny arrangements,*

**6. Do you have other views on the operation of the new duty to respond to petitions and the call for action?**

**Petitions**

- It was important to have some form of template for petitions to help people start petitions and to ensure that there was some consistency in presentation.
- If a certain number of individual letters were received on a certain issue consideration should be given as to whether these should qualify as a "petition" and fall within the guidance?
- The importance of retaining flexibility in relation to accepting petitions so that people were ruled in rather than ruled out by the process was emphasised.

- It is essential that there is an established process to track the progress of a petition or a call or action especially if it was subsequently passed to another authority to respond to. This process could be similar to the process used to track complaints.
- Local people organising a petition should attempt to involve their local Member if possible.

### **Call for Action**

- What would happen with issues that a Councillor raised as a Call for Action in relation to organisations such as the police or highways authority where the Council did not have an Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a remit to cover these bodies?
- The issue was raised of what would happen if a Councillor did not want to take an issue forward from his community and was part of a single Member ward or maybe involved in the issue in another way and therefore could not take the issue forward.
- The positive side of using this Councillor Call for Action to make PCTs and the police more accountable via elected representatives and giving Members a persuasive mechanism to draw issues to these bodies attention was emphasised. It places the emphasis on locally funded bodies such as the police, Fire, school governing bodies to be more accountable to their wider communities.
- It was suggested that the Call for Action powers should be extended to cover Quango's such as SEEDA, who were publicly funded.
- As part of the Call for Action the issue of support for the Councillor was raised.
- There would be a cost to all of this legislation and the issue of funding for this was mentioned.



## Local petitions and Calls for Action Consultation



The background of the page is a dark grey gradient. In the upper left quadrant, there are three overlapping circles of varying sizes and shades of light grey. The largest circle is on the right, partially cut off by the edge of the page. The other two are smaller and positioned to its left and above. The overall aesthetic is clean and modern.

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## Preface

This Government is determined to breathe new life into local democracy. That means giving elected local councillors the space to show a lead: less red tape from Whitehall and more freedom to spend money on local priorities. But it also means giving local people new opportunities to set the agenda for themselves, to have their say about local services and get things done on the issues they care about. Whether it's improving housing, cleaning up the streets, or getting tough with anti-social behaviour, it's often local people themselves who understand the problem best and can come up with the best solutions.

We've taken big steps towards 'devolution to the doorstep' in recent years. The 2006 Local Government White Paper *Strong and Prosperous Communities* made clear that new discretion for town halls needed to go hand in hand with greater accountability to local people. The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 provided a vital framework – a duty on local authorities to inform, consult and involve local people in their decisions and services, and new powers for local councillors to call for action on a broad range of local issues.

Today, we want to go further still. In *The Governance of Britain* the Prime Minister launched a national conversation about renewing our democracy, including at the local level; and in October, I published an *Action Plan for Community Empowerment*, setting out what my Department is doing to give people a real say over their neighbourhood.

This consultation takes forward one of the commitments in that plan – to look carefully at the idea of placing a duty on local authorities to respond constructively to the petitions they receive from local people.

We in the UK are some of Europe's biggest petition writers. People use petitions as a way to raise local issues they really care about – speed bumps, local shops, social care. Many local authorities already deal with petitions systematically, scrupulously and fairly.

But I want everyone, no matter where they live, to have the confidence of knowing that their concerns will be taken seriously. I believe that there is a case for acting to ensure that standards everywhere are brought up to those of the best, and am inclined to put all authorities on the same footing by providing a legislative framework for dealing with local petitions. I want to give people the chance to help shape that framework before reaching a conclusion on the best way forward.

I look forward to hearing your views.



**Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP,  
Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government**



## Chapter 1

### Introduction

1. The Governance of Britain Green Paper, published in July 2007, said that petitions can provide an important way for local communities to express their views collectively and generate local debate, and improve the connection between residents and local authorities. It added that the Government is considering the introduction of a duty requiring local authorities to consider and investigate petitions from local communities, and guarantee a response on the issues which have been raised.
2. In the Green Paper, the Government also announced its intention to consult on extending the right of people to intervene with their elected representatives through community rights to call for action.
3. This consultation paper seeks views on:
  - how the arrangements for local petitions can be strengthened and the details of how the new system might operate
  - the call for action introduced under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.
4. This consultation does not cover petitions to the House of Commons or the Government, which are dealt with separately in paragraphs 157 to 163 of the Governance of Britain.



## Chapter 2

### The consultation criteria

5. The Government has adopted a code of practice on consultations. The criteria below apply to all UK national public consultations on the basis of a document in electronic or printed form. They will often be relevant to other sorts of consultation. Though they have no legal force, and cannot prevail over statutory or other mandatory external requirements (e.g. under European Community Law), they should otherwise generally be regarded as binding on UK departments and their agencies, unless ministers conclude that exceptional circumstances require a departure.
  - Consult widely throughout the process, allowing a minimum of 12 weeks for written consultation at least once during the development of the policy
  - Be clear about what your proposals are, who may be affected, what questions are being asked and the timescale for responses
  - Ensure that your consultation is clear, concise and widely accessible
  - Give feedback regarding the responses received and how the consultation process influenced the policy
  - Monitor your department's effectiveness at consultation, including through the use of a designated consultation co-ordinator
  - Ensure your consultation follows better regulation best practice, including carrying out a Regulatory Impact Assessment if appropriate.
6. The full consultation code may be viewed at:  
[http://bre.berr.gov.uk/regulation/consultation/consultation\\_guidance/index.asp](http://bre.berr.gov.uk/regulation/consultation/consultation_guidance/index.asp)
7. Are you satisfied that this consultation has followed these criteria? If not, or if you have any other observations about ways of improving the consultation process please contact:  
  
Albert Joyce,  
Communities and Local Government Consultation Co-ordinator  
Zone 6/H10  
Eland House  
Bressenden Place  
London SW1E 5DU  
  
or by email to [albert.joyce@communities.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:albert.joyce@communities.gsi.gov.uk)
8. Please note that responses to the consultation itself should be sent to the contact shown within the main body of the consultation (page 17).
9. A summary of responses to this consultation will be published by 12 June 2008 (within three months of end of consultation period) at the address below:



[www.communities.gov.uk/corporate/publications/consultations/](http://www.communities.gov.uk/corporate/publications/consultations/)

Paper copies will be available on request.

10. Information provided in response to this consultation, including personal information, may be published or disclosed in accordance with the access to information regimes (these are primarily the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA), the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA) and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004).
11. If you want the information that you provide to be treated as confidential, please be aware that, under the FOIA, there is a statutory Code of Practice with which public authorities must comply and which deals, amongst other things, with obligations of confidence. In view of this it would be helpful if you could explain to us why you regard the information you have provided as confidential. If we receive a request for disclosure of the information we will take full account of your explanation, but we cannot give an assurance that confidentiality can be maintained in all circumstances. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the Department.
12. The Department will process your personal data in accordance with the DPA and, in the majority of circumstances, this will mean that your personal data will not be disclosed to third parties.

## Chapter 3

### Local petitions

#### Evidence for change

13. There is evidence that a formal process for handling petitions adds value to public life. In 2005, 38 per cent of respondents to the Citizenship Survey said they had undertaken a civic activity. 60 per cent of them claimed that they had signed a petition in the previous twelve months. Petitioning was the most commonly undertaken of the nine activities grouped under civic engagement for the purposes of this survey.
14. Qualitative research in 2006 found that participants felt that petitions were a good method for bringing issues to the attention of local government. However, they were sceptical about local government's ability or willingness to act on or be responsive to petitions<sup>1</sup>.
15. Overall, research indicates that responsiveness is a key element to petitions' political efficacy, whether in the form of a formal response from the governance body concerned, or of a referendum or ballot to decide the issue.
16. Petitioning is used in a number of countries as a trigger leading to electoral action, typically in the form of a referendum – Switzerland and the USA are typical examples. These can be either citizens' initiatives or popular referendums. In some instances, the referendums are binding. Petitions can also be used to initiate recall ballots. This system is used in the USA (at state and local/municipal levels), and in British Columbia, Canada.
17. Other jurisdictions, for example Scotland and Queensland, have formal petitioning systems which do not lead to ballots. Instead, the petitioner can expect a response from either the relevant committee or MP. In these examples, a response is not guaranteed.
18. Political parties and campaign groups in countries where petitioning is a well-established feature of the democratic landscape have become adept at using petitions to further their own agendas. They can also counteract a petition campaign, either through developing a counter proposal or by demobilising support for the petition. The evidence therefore indicates that petitioning (as a tool of direct democracy), can support representative democracy.

#### General principles underpinning a new duty

19. The Government believes that there should be a duty on local authorities to respond to petitions in the following circumstances:
  - (a) **The subject of the petition relates to the functions of the local authority, or other public services with shared delivery responsibilities with the local authority through the Local Area Agreement or other partnership arrangement**

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<sup>1</sup> BMG, 2006

20. Local authorities have a wide range of functions, which include the promotion of the social, environmental and economic wellbeing of the area and its people. They are the “place shapers” for their area, and this has been reinforced by provisions of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, which require a long list of partner organisations to cooperate with the local authority in developing the Sustainable Community Strategy for the area, and in setting local improvement targets. The role of local authorities has also been reinforced by the Sub National Review published in July 2007.
21. The Government’s proposal is that local authorities should be required to respond to any petition that asks them to consider any issue which falls within their broad functions as outlined above. Petitions which would more properly be dealt with by another public body – and raise issues which relate neither to local improvement targets agreed by that body, nor to the area’s sustainable community strategy – would fall outside the proposed new duty.
22. An important example of this principle will arise in the context of education services. A local authority would not be required to respond to a petition which raises issues which can only be addressed substantively by the governors and head-teacher of a particular school. On the other hand, the duty would apply where the petition relates to the education functions of the local authority.

**(b) The petition has been organised by a local person**

23. It is proposed that there should be nothing to prevent local petitioners from invoking the help of national organisations having wider interests – but that the organiser of record of a local petition should be a local person. It is that person who should present the petition to the local authority. We would welcome views about how “local person” should be defined. Obvious options are:
  - (a) a person appearing in the electoral register for the local authority’s area
  - (b) any adult who lives or works in the area at the time the petition is submitted, or
  - (c) any adult who has lived or worked in the area for at least a qualifying period of time before the petition is submitted.
24. Options (b) and (c) might both be extended to anyone who attends a school or college in the area, in order to make this form of engagement available to children. We would welcome respondents’ views on that possibility.

**(c) The petition demonstrates a sufficient level of support from local people**

25. On the one hand, requiring local authorities to respond to all petitions, even those with a minimum level of support, could impose unnecessary processes and costs. On the other, setting a very high level of support as a requirement for a petition to receive a formal response would frustrate the underlying purpose of the policy. There are three possible approaches to setting a threshold of a sufficient level of support. They are to define:

- in absolute terms the number of relevant signatories that a qualifying petition must have (for example, “at least 250 signatures”); or
- a qualifying petition as one that has the signatures of a given proportion of those whose signatures are regarded as relevant (for example, at least 1 per cent of the electorate of the area in question). This could make it difficult for the petition organiser to know how many signatures were required for the petition to be valid; or
- an absolute number, or a given proportion of the population, whichever is the lower (for example. “200 signatures or 5 per cent of the population” would mean that communities of less than 4,000 people would have to find fewer than 200 signatures).

### **Signatures**

26. In the above options, a “relevant” signature could be regarded as that either of:

- (a) an elector of the area; or
- (b) anyone who lives or works in the area.

Support would have to be reasonably current (e.g. signature within the last 12 months).

27. We would, in either case, want to consider options for extending the range of relevant signatures to local children who either live in the area, or attend school there. We would welcome respondents’ views on that possibility.
28. Support for petitions might take the traditional form (signature, date, and address), but we would want to allow for electronic petitions too, and would be glad to have respondents’ views on how they might work.
29. We believe local authorities should be entitled to accept signatures without further validation if they have no reason to doubt them; but should be empowered to investigate if they felt it necessary, and to strike them out if appropriate.

**(d) The petition satisfies minimum requirements in relation to:**

- i) The manner in which it was submitted**
  - ii) its form**
  - iii) its content**
30. It is proposed that petitioners ought to be able to present their petitions either to the council, or to one of its councillors.
31. Councils and their councillors would be under a general duty to consider whether any request or document they receive is a petition. We would hope to

avoid technicalities here. The word “petition” would, we hope, have a plain English meaning; we would probably not seek to define it in statute. Where a council or councillor is of the view that a document is a petition, that decision would trigger the petition provisions.

32. We take the view that a petition should at least contain:
- (a) the proposition which it promotes
  - (b) the name and address of the organiser
  - (c) the local authority from which a response is sought (and, if more than one, all the local authorities to which it has been submitted)
  - (d) the area to which it relates (i.e. the whole authority, or a defined area forming part of it)
  - (e) the names, addresses and signatures of those who support it (or, in the case of an electronic petition, their names, addresses and email addresses).

#### **Guidance**

33. We believe that the Secretary of State should have the power to issue guidance about all aspects of the process.

## Chapter 4

### Calls for action

#### The Councillors' Call for Action

34. In the recent Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, Parliament amended section 19 of the Police and Justice Act 2006 – before, indeed, it had come into force – to align it with the provision in section 119 of the 2007 Act. All councillors are thus empowered to refer local government matters and local crime and disorder matters for consideration by the relevant overview and scrutiny committees of their local authorities.
35. The result amounts to a “**councillor call for action**”. Any councillor will be able to refer a local matter affecting his or her ward or division to the appropriate overview and scrutiny committee of his or her authority. In the case of a local crime and disorder matter, that will be to the authority’s crime and disorder committee.
36. The committee is required then to put the matter on its agenda, and discuss it at a meeting. It is not to be required to take any further action; but all the powers it has – to mount inquiries, to require information, and to make reports and recommendations – are to be available to it, if it decides to take the matter up.
37. The power to refer a matter is available only where the matter is of direct concern to the ward or division which the councillor represents. A councillor can refer a matter even if no citizen has asked him or her to consider it. There is no requirement for councillors in multi-member wards to agree – any of them can refer a matter.
38. A local government matter, in relation to a member of a local authority, is defined as a matter which:
  - (a) relates to the discharge of any function of the authority
  - (b) affects all or part of the electoral area for which the member is elected or any person who lives or works in that area, and
  - (c) is not an excluded matter.

A local crime and disorder matter, in relation to a member of a local authority, has been defined to mean a matter concerning:

- (a) crime and disorder (including in particular forms of crime and disorder that involve anti-social behaviour or other behaviour adversely affecting the local environment), or
- (b) the misuse of drugs, alcohol and other substances

that affects the electoral area represented by the member, or the people who live or work in that area.

39. It will no doubt happen that some local issues have implications in more than one field. The Government's view is that, in such a case, the councillor would be entitled to refer it to every overview and scrutiny committee which covers some aspect of the issue. In practice, committees will, no doubt, take the sensible decision to join forces in order to consider such matters in the round.

Excluded matters

40. The Secretary of State has power to exclude by order specified descriptions of matter that would otherwise be "local government matters". This was included primarily so that confusion could be avoided between calls for action and well-defined statutory processes such as planning and licensing appeals. We now wish, as part of this consultation, to seek views about exactly what ought to be excluded, and why.

Guidance

41. The Secretary of State is empowered to issue statutory guidance for local authorities, their committees, and their members. She intends to do so when these measures are brought into force. Respondents are invited to highlight the key issues on which guidance (whether statutory or not), would be helpful.

Empowering communities to call for action

42. In the *Governance of Britain* green paper, Government highlighted its desire to achieve greater direct empowerment of communities, and undertook to consult on a number of areas, including "extending the right of people to intervene with their elected representatives through community rights to call for action".

43. Having established a *councillor* call for action (in law, if not yet in practice), we take the view that a duty on local authorities to respond to qualifying local petitions would amount to a *community* call for action – albeit a call made by a community of interest. We should, however, like to hear views on whether other steps should be considered as well.

## Chapter 5

### Consultation questions

44. We wish to take the views of citizens, local authorities, councillors and community organisations on all the details of the proposals set out in this document, but particularly on the following questions.

#### Petitions

- (a) The Government believes there should be a statutory duty on local authorities to respond to local petitions. What conditions must be met before a local authority is required to respond formally to a petition? (*Paragraph 19*)
- (b) In particular, how should we define the level of support required before a petition must get a formal, substantive response?
- By a fixed number of signatures?
  - By a percentage of the electorate in the area?
  - By a hybrid of the two?
  - Or in some other way? (*Paragraph 25*)

#### Calls for action

- (d) What if any matters should be excluded from the call for action? (*Paragraph 40*)
- (e) What guidance should Government provide on the operation of the councillor call for action? (*Paragraph 41*)

#### Overall

- (f) Taken together, would petitions and calls for action sufficiently empower communities to intervene with their elected representatives? Should we contemplate other measures? (*Paragraph 43*)
- (g) Do you have other views on the operation of the new duty to respond to petitions and the call for action?





## Chapter 6

### **How to submit your views**

Responses from individuals and organisations may be submitted in writing to the Department for Communities and Local Government.

Comments should be received no later than 20 March 2008 and should be sent to:

Rosie Milner  
Communities and Local Government  
5th floor, Zone F8  
Eland House  
Bressenden Place  
London SW1E 5DU  
or emailed to:  
[petitions@communities.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:petitions@communities.gsi.gov.uk)

The consultation document and its response form can be downloaded from the consultations page on the Communities and Local Government website ([www.communities.gov.uk](http://www.communities.gov.uk)). For details of how to order hard copies see the inside front cover.

This consultation is available on request in alternative formats.

We may publish or make public the responses and comments received. If you do not consent to this, you must clearly request that your response be treated confidentially. Any confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system in email responses will not be treated as such a request.

If you wish your response, if published, to be unattributable, please let us know when you send it to us. Unattributable responses may also be included in any statistical summary of comments received and views expressed.

## **Next steps**

The consultation will run until 20 March 2008. Once this deadline has passed, Government will consider the responses received by that date and issue a report on the consultation by 12 June 2008.

### **Regulatory Impact Assessment**

An Impact Assessment has not been produced as the cost to the public sector is likely to be less than £5 million per annum and the impact on the private and third sectors is likely to be negligible and currently unquantifiable. We would welcome suggestions as to how such impacts might be determined and will consider the need for an Impact Assessment as we take this policy forward.