CPRE South East Briefing

"Strong and Prosperous Communities"
The Kelly White Paper on Local Government

Campaign to Protect Rural England
SOUTH EAST REGION

Ruth Kelly issued her long awaited White Paper at lunchtime today. It is more a consolidation of the current regime than a revolution. The headline grabber is a proposal to give local authorities and parish councils power to pass their own bylaws, and issue their own fines. Perhaps it was needed to make the White Paper newsworthy as the proposals on mayors and unitary authorities have been well trailed in the press. And the rest, as you will read, is rather technical. The comments below are based on a first reading this lengthy and repetitive paper. Number in parentheses refer to paragraph numbers in the report.

1. Links

- **DCLG Press Release:** http://tinyurl.com/y8tqo8
- **White Paper:** http://tinyurl.com/yxm2u9 (two volumes and executive summary)
- **Early reaction.** The Local Government Association described the White Paper as encouraging: http://tinyurl.com/uyotc. The Telegraph said "Parishes to get power to impose local laws": http://tinyurl.com/y2eau7.

2. Buzz Words

A White Paper should not be judged by its buzz words, so don't let the following influence your opinions:

- Community: 781 (mentions in Vol 1 & Vol 2; includes plurals and variants)
- City: 348
- Economy: 298
- Leadership: 121
- Sustainable: 107
- City region: 38
- Power of well being: 36
- Unitary: 34
- Place shaping: 26
- Rural: 18
- Village: 9
- Regional Assembly: 4
- Landscape: 3
- Countryside: 0

3. Generalities

- **Reform.** The next stage of public sector reform has to be driven from below.
- **Communities.** A stronger focus on citizens and their communities is needed.
- **Leadership.** Three options to strengthen leadership are proposed, including elected mayors.
- **Unitary or two-tier?** Kelly is inviting bids for unitary status; two-tier authorities will need to improve.
- **Regions.** "The regional dimension is crucial. It is not a question of having to chose between strong cities and strong regions. Strong cities make stronger regions and strong cities need strong regions." (4.9)

- **City Regions** are seen as economic clusters and central to success within the global economy.
- **Barker.** Paragraph E11 and elsewhere show how Kate Barker's forthcoming report has been elevated to the status of a White Paper in its own right.
- **Climate change.** Chapter F is vague and mostly about best practice, but does promise an "appropriate focus on climate change" to the performance regime associated with Local Area Agreements.
- **Development companies.** "Early consultation" on city development companies. (4.10)
- **Housing numbers.** No significant comment. (4.75, 4.76).
- **Local tax.** No comment; waiting for the Lyons report. (4.105)
- **Transport.** More local authority influence over Passenger/Strategic Transport Authorities. (4.10)

4. Leadership

The White Paper presents three choices for local authority leadership ("one size will not fit all"): (1.22)

- a directly elected mayor
- a directly elected executive of councillors
- a leader elected by fellow councillors with a 4 year mandate.

5. Framework

The White Paper proposes the following overall framework: (5.26)

- a duty for the local authority to prepare the Sustainable Community Strategy in consultation with others as set out in section 4 of the Local Government Act 2000
- the Sustainable Community Strategy and other local and regional plans to be drawn up with regard to each other
- a new duty for the upper-tier local authority (in two-tier areas) or unitary authority to prepare a LAA in consultation with others
- a new duty for the local authority and named partners to cooperate with each other to agree the targets in the LAA (the partners are listed on page 100)
- a new duty for the local authority and named partners to have regard to relevant targets in the LAA—as set out by the relevant Secretary of State in directions.

6. Mechanisms

- **LSP.** Local Strategic Partnerships are confirmed as the main partnership mechanism in delivering the SCS (5.16ff).
- **SCS.** The importance of the Sustainable Community Strategy is confirmed and strengthened (1.23) but it must have a delivery plan (page 10). The SCS will include a Housing and Homelessness Strategy. (E35)
- **LAA.** Local Area Agreements are the delivery plan for the SCS. The LAA will set a single set of priorities for the LSP (page 11). "In future we see the LAAs as being the delivery plan for the Sustainable Community Strategy focused on a relatively small number of priorities for improvement." (5.35)
- **Targets.** The LAA will set about 35 priorities and targets (1.25; 5.13ff).
- **PIs.** The number of government performance indicators will be reduced to a mere couple of hundred (page 2).
- **MMA.** It is not clear how Multi Area Agreements will integrate with LAAs but it will be sorted out (4.94).
- **LDF/SCI.** The requirement for an independent examination of the Statement of Community Involvement of the LDF will be repealed. (E11)
- **CCfA.** It appears that the Community Call for Action introduced in the Police and Justice Bill will be extended to environmental issues, including climate change (F9)

7. Unitary or Two-Tier?

In conjunction with the White Paper, DCLG issued an invitation to local authorities to "make proposals for future unitary structures or to pioneer, as pathfinders, new two-tier models" (http://tinyurl.com/y2ymdp):

♦ the current status quo in two-tier authorities is not an option

♦ where there is broad support for unitary authorities, go for it

♦ most county authorities are to develop "innovative two-tier working"

♦ proposals for unitary authorities to be submitted by end January 2007, decision by end July, elections in May 2008 and up and running by April 2009

♦ proposals for innovative two-tiers to be submitted by end January 2007.

The aim of the pioneer two-tier model will be:

♦ unified service delivery

♦ stronger leadership for "place shaping"

♦ shared back-office and integrated service delivery.