

# Local area agreement

## What's it got to do with me?

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Local people addressing local priorities

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## Local area agreement What's it got to do with me?

Is this you?

- Do you help with a local community project, like a lunch club or tenants' association?
- Do you work in a charity or not-for-profit shop?
- Do you visit people who are housebound on behalf of an older people's organisation?
- Do you support younger people in a youth group or out-of-school club?
- Do you campaign for a group of people who are left out of the decisions that affect their lives?
- Do you collect or raise funds locally for an aid and development agency, like Christian Aid or Oxfam?

If you are one of the thousands of paid or unpaid people who spend part of their time working in any sort of voluntary or community organisation, then new opportunities are heading your way.

## You're needed!

Everyone has a right to be heard when it comes to making decisions about local services. No one should be ignored just because they belong to a small minority group.

Government recognises that local people and local groups have a huge store of knowledge and experience about what helps their communities work together and what risks causing divisions. Local groups may also have a better understanding of the local environment, and can help find the right balance between, say, the need for a better road system and the need for green spaces. Local people and local organisations are often in contact with the smallest communities and the most vulnerable people whom bigger organisations like local councils find it hard to reach.

If local groups can share this sort of knowledge, then they can help councils to be much more effective and efficient about the way they plan and deliver or commission public services.

## Who speaks for your group?

Because there are over 160,000 local voluntary and community groups, it would be impossible for local councils to talk to each one individually, so every area has a local infrastructure organisation – Voluntary Action, Council for Voluntary Service or something similar.

This organisation is in contact with the local groups and provides a wide range of services for them (for instance, help with accounting or writing constitutions). It supports them to voice their interests and concerns to the local council and other agencies such as emergency services,

health trusts and businesses. It also helps them to influence the planning and delivery of services to local people.

## A new way of working together

Voluntary and community groups form a major part of what the Government calls 'the third sector'; that is, groups that are neither private companies nor national or local government agencies.

Government wants to see more partnerships between local councils and third sector groups. Creating an 'environment for a thriving third sector' is one of the priorities that local authorities have been encouraged to adopt in new three-year agreements with the Government about how they provide services to the people who live and work in their districts.

These local area agreements have four main themes:

- Children and young people
- Safer and stronger communities
- Healthier communities and older people
- Economic development and the environment

The knowledge and experience of voluntary or community groups can make a really positive contribution to planning and delivering services around these themes. That's what the Government is hoping will happen as a result of the new agreements.

Local councils are being given much more flexibility around commissioning services from voluntary and community groups and around moving money from one budget to another.

## How to get involved

Your local infrastructure organisation – Voluntary Action, Council for Voluntary Service, Community Empowerment Network or equivalent – will be able to tell you more about your new local area agreement and how you can get involved.

If you're not already in touch with them, contact NAVCA to find out who they are.

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