

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

Institute of Local Government Studies

**Review and analysis of developments
in UK local government
and local governance, 2007-08**

*First and Second Reports to the
Japan Local Government Centre*

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Background

This report constitutes the first, and almost certainly the more substantial, part of a two-part review of developments relating to UK local government during what is in effect the 2007/08 financial year. It covers a longer period than was initially envisaged and, with the agreement of JLGC, is being presented at a later point in the year.

It also takes a substantially different form from that adopted by the 2005-06 report, and from that probably in the minds of those who drafted the contract. There are several reasons for this: a concern not to replicate some of the more basic explanatory material in the earlier report, and not to duplicate material readily available to JLGC readers through other channels; also a wish to make the report perhaps a little more directly Japan-relevant. These matters have been discussed with JLGC's Research and Policy Manager, and with her agreement this First Report is presented entirely in the form of a timeline – but a very much more bolstered timeline than that suggested in the contract. The hope is that the presentation of events and developments in this way may enable them to be more readily comprehensible to readers not completely familiar with the world of UK local government.

If this proves not to be the case, the Second Report, due now to be presented in early June, can revert to a more traditional format. Similarly, if there are topics that are felt to require more extended treatment, these too can be addressed in the Second Report. That report, like this one, will be produced with the guidance of Irmelind Kirchner, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank her for her advice and assistance to date.

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TIMELINE OF KEY EVENTS RELATING TO UK LOCAL GOVERNMENT

April – December 2007

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TIMELINE OF KEY EVENTS RELATING TO UK LOCAL GOVERNMENT April – December 2007

<p><u>April 2007</u> April 2</p>	<p>The Local Government Association (LGA) renews its campaign to standardise the school year. Traditionally, most UK schools, as in Japan, have had a three-term year, but starting in September (August in Scotland), rather than April. This practice dates from pre-industrial times, when children assisted with the summer harvesting. In recent years, however, this 3-term model, with precise dates varying across local authorities, has been criticised by educationalists, and the LGA has led a campaign to develop a standard school year, with the 3 terms divided into 6 terms of more equal length and nationally standardised dates. The Association’s research claims that this would benefit children by giving them more continuity in their learning, and would save childcare costs for parents with children in differently timetabled schools.</p>
<p>April 4 (see also May 21)</p>	<p>The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) publishes a consultation paper, <i>Permitted Development Rights for Householder Microgeneration</i>, outlining proposals to abolish the need for householders to obtain planning permission to install microgeneration devices, such as solar panels, heat pumps and wind turbines, for domestic purposes where there is minimal impact on neighbouring properties.</p> <p>Lacking either significant coal reserves or, more recently, any equivalent to North Sea oil and gas, Japan’s promotion of microgeneration started rather earlier than in the UK, with its 1997 ‘Ten Thousand Roofs’ programme. But the Climate Change and Sustainable Energy Act 2006 emphasised local authorities’ duty to encourage and support localised heat and/or electricity from renewable sources, and a relaxation of planning regulations would obviously assist councils in advising householders in selecting and using the most appropriate form of microgeneration.</p>
<p>April 5</p>	<p>The Audit Commission’s Fire and Rescue Service Performance Assessment shows that the major modernisation of the service in 2003/04 (see Wilson and Game, 2006, pp.130-31) seems to be having positive effects. The modernising measures emphasised fire safety and prevention – fire-stopping, rather than fire-fighting – and the AC’s figures show the lowest level of fire deaths since 1958, with significant falls too in the numbers of deliberate fires and malicious fire call-outs.</p>
<p>April 6</p>	<p>An LGA monitoring survey shows a growing use by councils of fines for ‘environmental crimes’. The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 gave additional powers to councils – including some ‘sub-principal’ town and parish councils – to deal with various forms of anti-social behaviour and environmental offences: e.g. litter dropping, graffiti, fly-tipping (dumping waste illegally), abandoned vehicles, fly-posting (poster advertising in unauthorised places), and dog offences. The survey shows that councils had issued well over 60,000 fines in the first year of the Act’s operation and were now doing so at an increasing rate.</p>
<p>April 12</p>	<p>A Brussels meeting of European local government associations discusses how to respond to a number of recent developments emanating from the European Union (EU) and its institutions that affect – adversely, some feel – the delivery of public services. Of particular relevance to UK local government are recent rulings by the Luxembourg-based European Court of Justice – the EU’s highest court – that could make it more difficult for local authorities to share services and undertake joint procurements without first advertising on an EU-wide basis.</p>

April 18	<p>The LGA reports that some councils are finding that their crematoria furnaces are unable to cope with the exceptionally large coffins required in our increasingly obese society. Whereas in Japan, partly because of the shortage of funeral plots, almost all deceased are cremated, in the UK, although the proportion has more than doubled in the past 50 years, it is still only about 70%. Several councils are reported as having had to build new cremators, although they are at the same time able to instal new filters to reduce mercury emissions, as required by law in 2112.</p>
April 18	<p>Harriet Harman, Justice Minister at the Department for Constitutional Affairs with particular responsibility for reform of the family justice system, puts forward the idea that councils should appoint an Executive Member for the Family – “a councillor in each local authority with responsibility for looking across the council’s services to ensure they support families”. The proposal came in a speech to the New Local Government Network (NLGN), in which the Minister also advocated that there be a Secretary of State for the Family in central government, with whom the designated council members could liaise.</p>
April (see also May 24)	<p>Refuse collection and recycling emerge as the most controversial local issues in the May local elections.</p> <p>UK refuse collection and disposal differ markedly from Japanese practice. More so than in any other European country, the great bulk of UK municipal refuse goes into landfill – now almost extinct in Japan – with under 10% incinerated, and nowadays nearly 30% recycled or composted. By comparison, a very high proportion of Japanese refuse, by European standards, is incinerated (in sometimes exotically decorated incinerators), while the country’s approach to recycling, both culturally (the ‘closed loop economy’) and in practice, is seen as a model for much of Europe.</p> <p>The election debate focuses on the approximately 150 councils – mainly ‘lower-tier’ district councils in two-tier county-district areas of England – that have switched, partly of course for financial reasons, to two-weekly or Alternate Weekly Collections (AWCs) of actual refuse bins, while providing householders with additional recycling containers for plastics, paper, ‘green’ waste, etc. Initially at least the change has proved highly unpopular with many residents (and voters), and councils have sought to justify their policy by claiming that it provides both the incentive and means for householders to increase the proportion of refuse that they recycle. This claim is apparently now confirmed in an LGA analysis showing that councils with AWCs recycle 30% of waste, while councils with weekly collections manage only 23%. The LGA study projects that, if AWCs were extended across the whole country, local taxpayers would save £22 million (4,650 JPY) in landfill taxes, which are due to increase by 33% in 2008/09, and cut landfill by 1.2 million tonnes.</p>

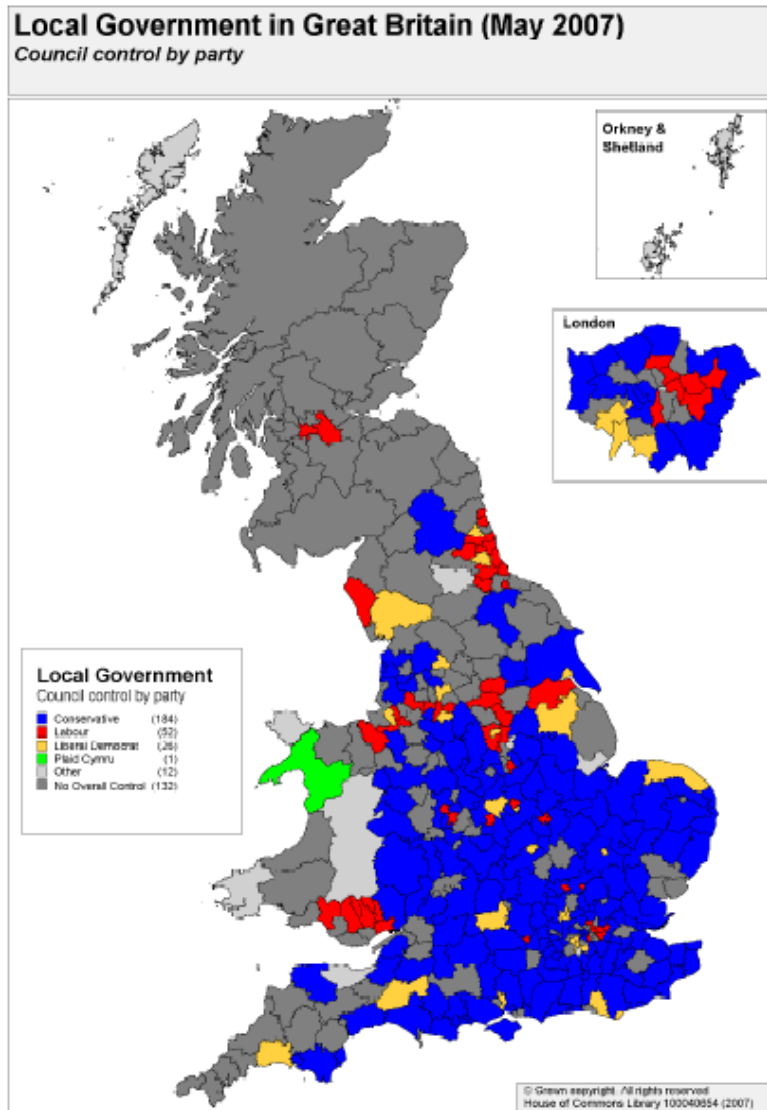
<p><u>May 1</u></p>	<p>The Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) publishes a research report, <i>The Future Shape of Local Authority Workforces</i>, based on a survey of 26 local authority Chief Executives. The survey looks particularly at the growing practice of providing shared access to services across (sometimes different tiers of) local authorities and increasingly other providers: police and fire services, primary care trusts, and the voluntary sector.</p> <p>It is striking that, almost without exception, the ‘driver’ of these collaborative arrangements has been the Government’s demand for continuing, year-on-year efficiency savings. The needs and interests of service users, issues of accountability and scrutiny appear to have been, at best, secondary considerations, and the Local Government Information Unit (LGIU) questions in its briefing whether there shouldn’t be rather greater and earlier involvement of councillors.</p>
<p>May 2</p>	<p>The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) publishes guidelines for local authorities about cigarette litter prevention. The guidelines, developed by the charity, Environmental Campaigns, anticipate the extension to England in July of a widespread smoking ban in enclosed workplaces and public spaces, including bars, clubs and restaurants.</p> <p>As particularly non-smoking visitors to Japan swiftly realise, the country is a kind of smokers’ paradise. Cigarettes cost about a quarter of the price in the UK – up to £6.00 (1,250 JPY) for a packet of 20. Through the ubiquitous vending machines, convenience stores, and even pharmacies (?) they are very easily available, and anti-smoking health warnings are generally much lower key than in the UK. What public smoking bans there are, therefore, tend to be very localised. Here, public support for comprehensive public bans has moved swiftly in the past few years, and, led initially by a few individual local authorities (most notably Liverpool), and then the devolved administrations in Scotland (March 2006), Wales and Northern Ireland (April 2007), Westminster MPs were in effect forced to follow the trend. The hope is that such legislation will eventually lead to less smoking and therefore less smoking litter, but in the short term litter is likely to increase, as smokers are driven out on to the streets. The DEFRA guidelines relate, therefore, to issues such as the provision of ashtrays, signage, education campaigns, and enforcement.</p>
<p>May 3</p>	<p>Local elections in England and Scotland; also elections to the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales.</p> <p>In Japanese terms, sub-national elections in Great Britain (Northern Ireland is slightly different) have always been ‘unified’ – i.e. all local authority and regional elections in any particular year take place on the first Thursday in May. UK local government, however, tends not to see this as having ‘unified’ local elections, because different types of local authority have different election cycles – some having ‘whole council’ elections every four years, and others with elections two or three years out of four. More complicating still, English district and unitary councils are able to choose which form of cycle they have. The confusing and democratically inequitable result is that voters in the same types of, or even neighbouring, local authorities may have differing numbers of opportunities to vote for and influence their councillors. To eliminate this particular anomaly, the Electoral Commission has recommended that councils’ electoral cycles should be standardised, and that there should be a ‘Local Election Day’ on which all voters would know they have the chance to determine the political make-up of their councils. An adaptation of this recommendation was also made by the Councillors Commission (see Dec.10 below).</p>

<p>English local elections</p>	<p>This year over 11,700 council seats (53% of the GB total) were contested in 312 English and 32 Scottish councils:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all 36 English metropolitan boroughs ($\frac{1}{3}$ of seats only = 827) • 25 English unitary authorities (all seats = 1,298) • 20 English unitary authorities ($\frac{1}{3}$ seats = 360) • 152 English shire districts (all seats = 6,743) • 79 English shire districts ($\frac{1}{3}$ seats = 1,258) • all 32 Scottish unitary authorities (all seats = 1,222). <p>Which meant that no local elections were held this year in Wales, Northern Ireland, London, English county councils, 7 English district councils, and 1 unitary council.</p> <p>Headline results in England:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average turnout for all contested authorities was 37%, which is very slightly higher than in most recent years; highest average figures were in shire district and unitary councils with whole council elections. • 75 English councils (24% of those contested) changed political control. • Conservatives were the biggest winners, making net gains of 38 councils and over 900 seats. They took 6 councils each from Labour (including Blackpool and Plymouth) and the Liberal Democrats (including Bournemouth and Torbay) and 35 that previously had been under No Overall Control (NOC) of any single party. But they also lost 6 councils to NOC. • Labour lost a net 550 seats, gaining 3 councils from NOC (including Leicester), but losing 5 (including Sheffield, Oldham, and Blackburn with Darwen). The party now has no representation at all on 90 English district and unitary councils. • The Liberal Democrats made a net loss of about 300 seats, gaining 2 councils from the Conservatives, 4 from NOC, and losing 4 to NOC. • The Green Party – currently England’s biggest ‘minor’ party – fielded over 1,400 candidates in England and won 60 seats. There are now 10 or more Greens on Lancaster, Brighton and Norwich councils. • The British National Party – a right-wing, nationalist, populist party with (fortunately, some would say) no real Japanese equivalent – contested just over half as many seats as the Greens, received three-quarters as many votes, but won only 10 seats, a net gain of just 1. • Nearly 31% of the elected councillors were women. • 3 mayoral elections were held alongside council elections in the respective authorities. In each case the incumbent Independent mayor was re-elected. • The major parties’ estimated national equivalent shares of the vote (i.e. if all GB voters, instead of approximately 80%, had had the opportunity to vote) were: Conservatives: 40% - their highest since 1992 (the year of their last General Election victory), and before that since 1982; Labour: 26% - equal to their lowest since at least the 1970s; 10% below their total in 2005 and in 1983, the year of their worst General Election defeat; Liberal Democrats: 24%. <p>The summary table below shows the near-reversal of the respective positions of the Conservative and Labour parties in the country’s local government since Labour came into power nationally in 1997. Then, almost one in every two councillors was Labour and the party controlled, either on its own or in coalition, almost all major councils. The Conservatives had fewer councillors and councils even than the Liberal Democrats. Since then, the Conservatives have more than doubled their number of councillors and control on their own more councils than Labour did in 1997.</p>
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Great Britain	Conserv.		Labour		Lib Dem		NOC	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Council control:1996/97	23	5	205	47	50	11	134	30
2007/08	206	47	58	13	29	7	134	30
							Indep/Others	
Councillors: 1996/97	4,450	20	10,650	48	4,760	21	2,150	10
2007/08	9,430	43	5,460	25	4,400	20	2,520	12

Put this table alongside the map, however, and a slightly qualified picture presents itself. Labour's severely reduced number of councils is highly concentrated in the most urban areas in particularly Northern England and Wales, and it still has single-party control of 13 of the 36 metropolitan boroughs. Indeed, of the 148 unitary and top-tier authorities (i.e. excluding the 238 English district councils), Labour has single-party control in 35, the Conservatives in 55, and the Liberal Democrats in 11.

The Conservatives, on the other hand, control very large numbers of relatively small districts, but have no more than a single seat on many more significant town and city councils: Manchester, Liverpool, Newcastle Upon Tyne, Sheffield, Gateshead, Durham, Cambridge. In local government, as in parliamentary representation, the Conservatives are becoming a largely English party, while Labour's support is increasingly confined to inner urban areas.



<p>Scotland – local elections</p>	<p>Scotland’s local elections were of special interest this year, because for the first time they were conducted not by a plurality (‘first-past-the-post’) electoral system in single-member wards, but by the proportional and preferential Single Transferable Vote (STV) system in 3- and 4-member wards. It was the first use of STV in a large-scale Great Britain election and was naturally seen as a kind of pilot. A feature of STV is that, while readily comprehensible to most voters, the counting process is complex and potentially protracted, given all the vote transfers involved. Fortunately, therefore, electronic counting was introduced for the first time and proved to be a success.</p> <p>Headline features of the elections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of councillors (1,222) remained unchanged, which meant a reduction of over two-thirds in the number of wards, and thus a big reduction in the numbers of candidates fielded by the parties compared with the previous elections in 2003. Labour candidates, for example, declined from 920 to 521. • Voters’ choice increased, however, with an average of 7.4 candidates on each ballot paper, compared with 3.4 in 2003. • The most obvious outcome of the elections and the direct consequence of STV can also be seen in the above map: namely, the near-disappearance of councils controlled by a single party – from 19 to just 5, only 2 of which are controlled by an actual <i>party</i> – Glasgow and North Lanarkshire, both Labour. The 3 ‘island’ councils – Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles – still have majorities of Independents, but here, as on all councils, politics have become more complex. • Of the 27 NOC councils, 9 have single-party minority administrations (6 Labour) and 19 are run by various forms of coalition: 14 two-party and 5 multi-party. Interestingly, no fewer than 7 of these coalitions exclude the council’s largest party, which of course means that many councillors now find themselves working closely with former political ‘enemies’. • In terms of council seats, the Scottish National Party (SNP) was by far the biggest winner, almost doubling its total from 182 to 363 and, in terms of seats, able to call itself the biggest party in the nation’s local government. Labour was the big loser, its seats down from 509 to 348, while the Liberal Democrats (166) lost 9 seats and the Conservatives (143) gained 20. Independents, traditionally a stronger force in Scottish than in English local government, lost 45 seats and now number 184. • The above results enabled supporters of STV and of proportional electoral reform generally to pronounce the elections a success. However, one kind of outcome that might have been hoped for – an increase in the numbers of women councillors and those from smaller parties – did not materialise. The proportions of women candidates selected by all major parties declined, although the proportion actually elected stayed almost the same at 21.6% and well below the Great Britain average of about 29%. Smaller parties combined have just 20 councillors, including 8 Greens – the principal cause here being the relatively high thresholds required for election in 3- and 4-member wards. <p>This new generation of Scottish councillors is the first to benefit from remuneration by salary, rather than allowances – the intention being to ‘professionalise’ the role. Main elements of the salary package are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a salary of £15,452 (3.26 m. JPY) for ‘basic’ councillors, set nationally; • 4 salary levels for leaders, from £30,905 to £51,508 (6.5 m. to 10.9 m. JPY); • enhanced salaries up to 75% of the leader’s for senior councillors with additional responsibilities.
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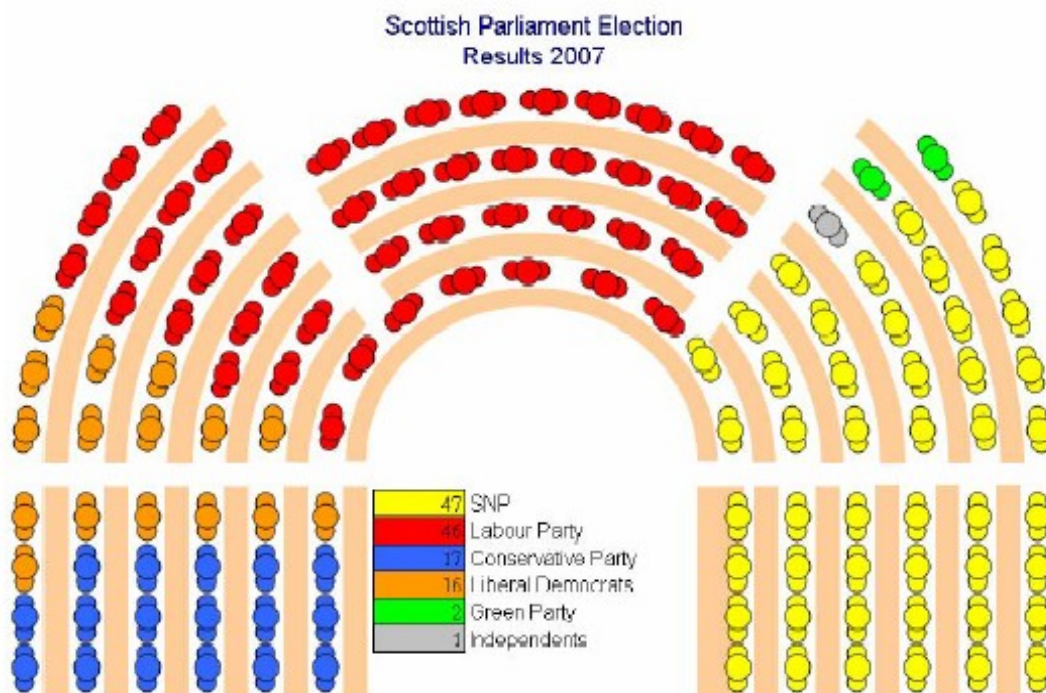
Scottish Parliament elections

In addition to coping with a new local electoral system, the Scots also voted for the **Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs)** in elections that provided the year's most historically important story for government beyond the 'Westminster village'. These elections too are by a form of proportional representation – in this case the **Additional Member System (AMS)**, specifically designed to prevent, in normal circumstances, one-party government. As in Japan's similar 'parallel' Diet elections, voters have two votes: for constituency MSPs in 73 single-member constituencies, and for 56 party list members in 8 regions. The difference is that, while in Japan the two parts of the election are independent of each other, in the Scottish (and Welsh) AMS system allocations of party list members compensate for under-representation of parties stemming from the constituency results.

Throughout the 8-year existence of the Scottish Parliament there had been a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition administration. The 2007 elections resulted in the nation's **first Scottish National Party (SNP) minority administration**, headed by the party's leader and **First Minister of Scotland, Alex Salmond**.

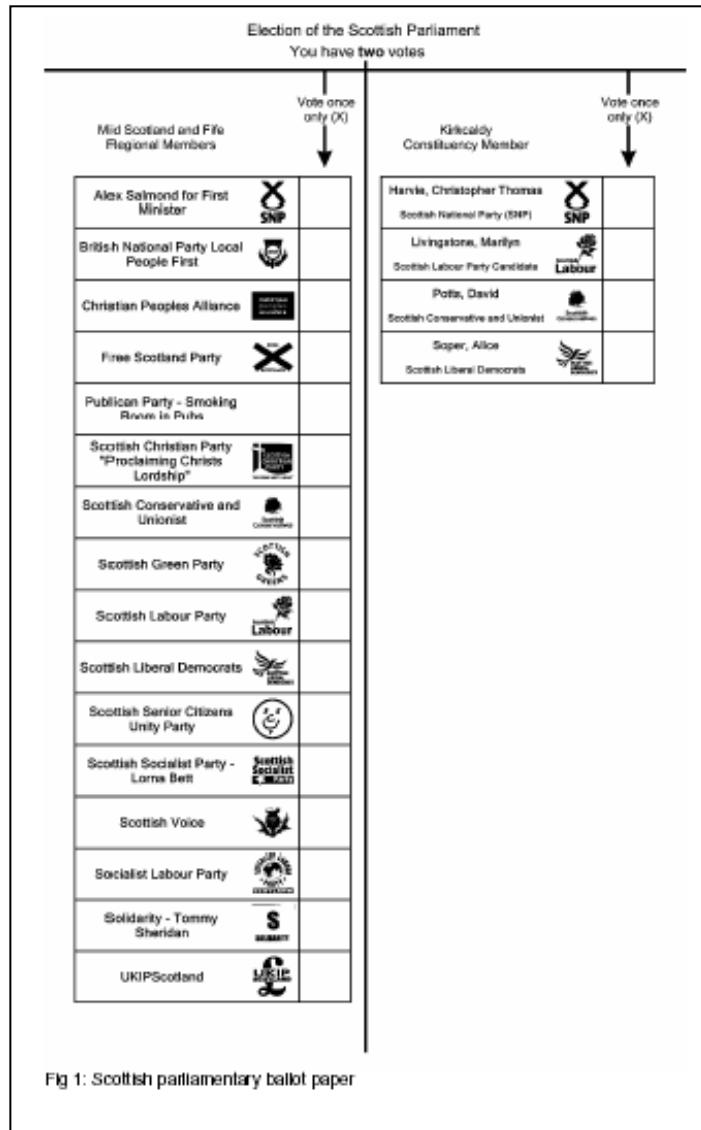
Headlines of the election:

- **Turnout** was approximately **52%**, a small increase from 2003's 49%.
- The number of **SNP** councillors increased from 27 in the 2003 elections to **47**, giving the party a **1-seat lead over Labour**, whose representation fell from 50 to 46. The Conservatives and Liberal Democrats each lost a seat, leaving them with 17 and 16 seats respectively – neither number quite sufficient on its own to enable the formation of a majority coalition with the SNP, even if any of the parties concerned had been inclined to – see diagram.
- Numerically, even bigger losers than Labour were the minor parties and Independents whose total of 17 seats in the 2003 elections gave them a significant voice in what became known as the 'Rainbow Parliament'. The pre-2003 'normality' of major party dominance was restored in 2007, the Greens alone losing 5 of their 7 seats, and the minor party/Independent total being reduced to 3.



<p>National Assembly for Wales elections</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 2 Greens, however, did negotiate a Cooperation Agreement with the SNP – not a full ‘confidence and supply’ commitment, as was briefly discussed, but an agreement to work constructively together on policy areas where there is common ground. <p>The National Assembly for Wales came into being at the same time as the Scottish Parliament (1999), and the 4-yearly elections for the two bodies, using only slightly differing forms of AMS, coincide. These elections too brought into government for the first time a nationalist party committed to at least long-term independence for its nation. However, while the SNP-Scottish Greens’ Cooperation Agreement took days to negotiate, the eventual, more formal, ‘One Wales’ coalition between Labour and Plaid Cymru (the Welsh nationalist party) took 7 weeks, during which time Labour continued in office as a single-party minority administration.</p> <p>In the Assembly elections, Labour was the main losing party, its 32.2% of the vote being the party’s second lowest in any Wales-wide election since 1923. Unlike in Scotland, however, it retained its position as the largest party, with 26 seats compared to its pre-election 29. Plaid Cymru won 15 seats (+3), the Conservatives 12 (+1), and the Liberal Democrats 6 (no change).</p> <p>At least two other sets of coalition arrangements were widely discussed: Labour-Liberal Democrat, which would have recreated the Assembly’s 2000-03 administration, and an anti-Labour or ‘Rainbow’ coalition of Plaid Cymru, the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats. The most controversial part of the ‘One Wales’ agreement is the Plaid Cymru policy of holding a referendum on new law-making powers for the Assembly, which would effectively make it a primary legislative body like the Scottish Parliament. Leaders of the national Labour Party are critical, feeling that this would represent a big step towards Welsh independence.</p>
<p>Postscript to the Scottish elections</p>	<p>In the course of the electronic count of the Scottish Parliamentary election votes, it became clear that a significantly higher proportion of ballot papers was being rejected as ‘spoilt’ than had been the case in previous elections – over 4%, which equates to an average of about 1,200 per constituency or about 90,000 in total. To investigate this and various other disputed aspects of the administration of these elections – e.g. the decision to combine the Parliamentary and local elections, the electronic counting process – the Scottish Government asked the Electoral Commission to establish an independent Scottish Elections Review. This review, chaired by the Canadian elections expert, Ron Gould, reported on October 23, but, for the sake of convenience, is summarized here.</p> <p>The Review’s major findings and recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The current division of legislative and administrative responsibility between the Scottish Office (under the Secretary of State for Scotland), responsible for the Scottish Parliamentary elections, and the Scottish Government, responsible for the local elections, is seriously unsatisfactory, and means that “it cannot be guaranteed” that elections will be conducted effectively. The division should be resolved, and the Scottish Government is the “obvious choice” to be the overall responsible body. • Combining the elections was not, on balance, a good thing. Despite the financial and personnel savings and the possibly increased turnout for the local elections, the combined arrangement does a “disservice” to local councils, to candidates, and the electorate. In future, Parliamentary and local elections should be separated by preferably a period of 2 years.

- The high number of rejected ballot papers had not resulted primarily from the introduction of the new STV system in the local elections, which had evidently been understood by almost all electors and produced only a relatively small number of spoilt papers. Rather, it derived from the fact that, in debating the design of the Parliamentary ballot paper, far too much attention was given to partisan advantage at the expense of voter convenience. Unlike in previous elections, the constituency and regional list ballots were **combined on a single ballot paper**:



- In future, the constituency and regional ballot papers should be on separate sheets. There should be a public lottery to determine the positioning of parties on the ballot papers, and parties should be described by their registered names.

May 3

The new **Code of Conduct for Councillors**, defining the standards of behaviour required of all elected council members in the conduct of their duties, comes into force. The revised Code is intended to be, according to the October 2006 White Paper, simpler, clearer and – most importantly – more proportionate. In particular, it modifies the previously extremely wide and potentially unclear rules concerning the disclosure of personal interests, and removes the barriers to councillors speaking on behalf of their constituents or the public bodies on which they may serve.

<p>May 8</p>	<p>The British Medical Association (BMA – the main professional association for practising doctors in the UK) – publishes a Green Paper, <i>A rational way forward for the NHS in England</i>, to be debated at its annual meeting in June.</p> <p>The Paper is partly a critique of current Government policy as being too narrowly focused on structural change and the ‘marketisation’ of health, with too little patient and professional involvement in planning, and partly a set of proposals generally intended to separate national politics and politicians from the day-to-day running of the health service. In fact, the idea seems to be that the NHS would be better if it was structured and organised rather more like the BBC.</p> <p>Key recommendations include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a constitution for the NHS, setting down an agreement between the government, the NHS and the public, which should contain: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ the core values of the NHS; ○ a charter explaining what the public can expect from the NHS and what the NHS expects from them; ○ the arrangements in place to determine the range of services that are nationally available on the NHS and nationally agreed standards for the quality of services. • an independent board of governors, appointed by and accountable to Parliament. • a governor-appointed executive management board, responsible for guiding the performance and national operations of the NHS. <p>Unlike in Japan, the NHS is of course structurally completely separate from local government, but a point of interest for local government in the Green Paper is the proposal for elected local health councils, “to provide a link between the community and health professionals/managers who are shaping local services”. Little detail is given of how such councils would be elected or what they would do, but there are some in local government who tend instinctively to suspect an undermining or bypassing of councils whenever mention is made of elected single-purpose bodies.</p>
<p>May 15</p>	<p>The DCLG publishes <i>The Quirk Review of Community Management and Ownership of Public Assets ‘Making Assets Work’</i>, led by Barry Quirk, Chief Executive of Lewisham London Borough Council.</p> <p>The review, stemming from the 2006 Local Government White Paper, is part of the Government’s proclaimed intention to devolve more powers to citizens, communities and (not necessarily the same thing) local government. Its brief was to identify and recommend the removal of any barriers preventing community-led organisations taking over the ownership and/or management of local public assets – that is, land and buildings currently owned by central or local government or their agencies. Interestingly, a principal conclusion of the review is that there are in fact no major substantive barriers. The powers already exist – not least under the Local Government Act 1972 – for local authorities to transfer an asset to community ownership and management in any manner it wishes, including at less than market value. The bigger obstacle, the review suggests, is a lack of awareness on the part of ‘communities’ (undefined) of the existing powers to act, and that perhaps what is needed is less a change to the law than a change, somehow, to a more communal and participative culture.</p> <p>Much of the responsibility for promoting awareness, information and guidance about the potential benefits of asset transfer must, the review concludes, rest with central</p>

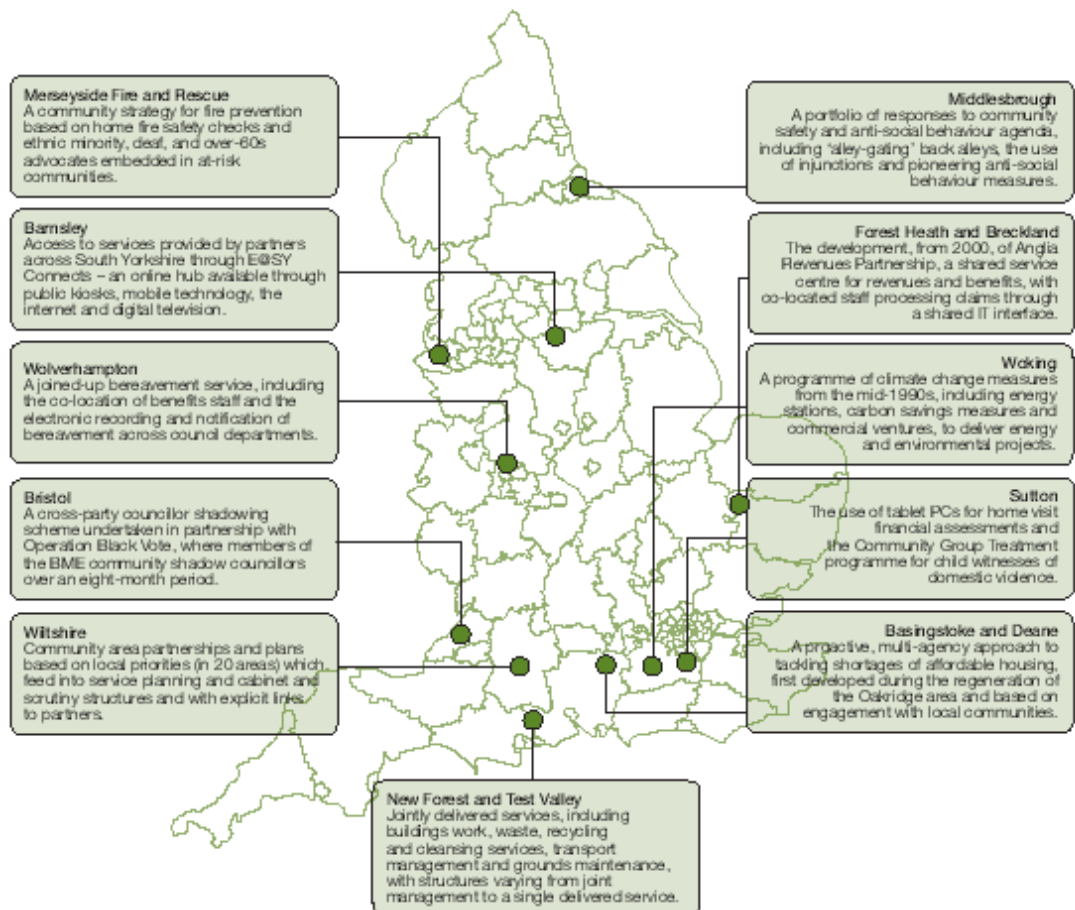
government, as must any kind of incentive funding. Local authorities, though, have responsibilities too – probably the most important of which is the production of an **area-wide strategy for the use of assets**, drawn up in consultation with other public and third sector bodies.

May 16

The Audit Commission publishes a practitioner-focused report, *Seeing the light: Innovation in local public services*, intended to encourage local authorities to see consider innovation – introducing something new to the organisation, breaking with established practice, as opposed to mere incremental change – as a way of achieving the continuous performance improvement that is one of their statutory duties.

The Commission argues that, while many councils can claim some form(s) of innovation – in service design or delivery, managerial process, democratic engagement, etc. – its own corporate assessments (as part of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment regime) suggest that only about a third of unitary and county councils are involved in *extensive* innovation. Chapter 2 of the report – in some ways the most interesting – maps and illustrates the extent of innovation in local authorities, the areas of activity in which innovation occurs, and the pressures that drive it. 10 of the examples of successful and sustained innovation identified here are developed into case studies (see map), that are available on the Commission’s website: <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/localgovernment/innovation/casestudies.asp?CategoryID=english^576>.

Fieldwork sites of innovative practice in local authorities



Source: Audit Commission

<p>May 21</p>	<p>The Government publishes its planning White Paper, <i>Planning for a Sustainable Future</i> – one of a co-ordinated series of policy documents (see Transport, May 22; Energy, May 23; Waste Strategy, May 24) presenting a comprehensive picture of the Government’s position on the future physical development of England and, through working in conjunction with the devolved administrations, the UK as a whole. All documents are subject to consultation over the coming few months.</p> <p>The existing planning system, the White Paper asserts, is too complex and unwieldy to deal effectively with the demands now being made upon it by factors such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • climate change and the pressures on the environment and natural resources; • the long-term security of energy supplies; • the requirements of economic development; • the housing shortage; • the public’s increasing expectations of higher quality infrastructure, public services, commercial and leisure facilities. <p>Development decisions are often taken at an inappropriate level – local when they should be national and vice versa; they frequently take too long and leave those affected feeling unconsulted.</p> <p>The White Paper’s proposals are intended to achieve four major objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a quicker system to decide major infrastructure projects; • a simplified local planning system for householders; • a prioritisation in planning policy rules of tackling climate change and reducing carbon emissions; • ensuring the planning system continues to support vibrant town centres. <p>The system for dealing with major infrastructure projects will involve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • national policy frameworks, setting out how the country’s key infrastructure needs for the next 10-25 years are to be met; • a new independent Infrastructure Planning Commission (IPC) of planners, lawyers, environmentalists, community experts, etc. to decide on major projects in transport, water, waste and energy on the basis of their consistency with the national policy framework. The IPC will have a duty to consult with the public and local authorities – a process that should include ‘open floor’ debates rather than more formal courtroom-style inquiry hearings. • a new legal requirement on developers to consult with key parties, such as environmental groups and heritage experts. <p>The streamlined planning system for householders will involve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • abolition of the need for planning permission for minor developments – small-scale extensions, micro-generation devices like solar panels, etc. – where they clearly have little or no impact on neighbours (see April 4). • reinforced powers for local authorities to restrict planning permission for ‘eyesore’ developments. • a new ‘fast track’ appeals system, with appeals having to be lodged within 2 instead of 6 months, and processed within 2 instead of 4 months. <p>Local government’s initial response to the White Paper is one of broad support for much – though not all – of the planning process reforms, and some relief regarding the land use proposals. The White Paper draws extensively on the Treasury-commissioned (Kate) <i>Barker Review of Land Use Planning</i> (December 2006), but appears at least to have modified some of that report’s more contentious language, particularly relating to land use.</p>
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	<p>Barker wanted to see all ‘green belt’ land – designated areas around major towns and cities protected from development, in order to preserve the countryside and prevent ‘urban sprawl’ – reviewed, with some of it being developed for ‘sustainable uses’. This prompted serious concern as to how ‘sustainable uses’ might be interpreted, and that the ‘review’, while acceptable in principle, could lead to major housing and further out-of-town retail development, at the expense of Governments’ recent focus on town centre regeneration. The White Paper, however, gives a clear commitment to protect the green belt, and proposes new planning rules that would enable councils to prioritise town centres over out-of-town shopping and to block any developments threatening the survival of high streets and small shops.</p> <p>Local government’s greater concerns now are possibly about the Government’s new quango, the ITC. Not only will decisions previously determined locally be, possibly rightly, in future made nationally, but they will be made by a non-elected, body, rather than, say, by an accountable Minister.</p>
<p>May 22 (see also July 11)</p>	<p>The Department for Transport (DfT) publishes a Draft Local Transport Bill to improve public transport and reduce urban congestion. The Bill derives in part from the Transport Study by Sir Rod Eddington – <i>Transport’s Role in Sustaining the UK’s Productivity and Competitiveness</i> (Dec. 2006), which examined the long-term links between transport and the UK’s economic productivity, growth and stability within the context of the Government’s commitment to sustainable development.</p> <p>The provisions of the draft Bill attracting greatest attention involve local authorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • acquiring additional powers to improve the quality of local bus services – e.g. by encouraging Voluntary Partnership Agreements between local authorities and bus operators, and empowering them to specify frequencies, timings and maximum fares. • having additional discretion to develop local congestion-reducing road pricing schemes, with a reduced role for the Minister to approve individual transport authorities’ forms of local consultation or proposed charging schedules. <p>In what is still a relatively novel parliamentary arrangement, the Bill will be subject to pre-legislative scrutiny by the House of Commons Transport Committee at the same time as the DfT undertakes its public consultation.</p>
<p>May 23</p>	<p>The Department for Trade and Industry (DTI) [soon to be the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform] publishes its Energy White Paper, <i>Meeting the Energy Challenge</i>, designed to address the nation’s two long-term energy challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tackling climate change by reducing carbon dioxide emissions; • ensuring secure, clean and affordable energy as the country becomes increasingly dependent on imported fuel. <p>Proposals of most relevance to local authorities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a mandatory ‘cap-and-trade’ Carbon Reduction Commitment (CRC) for what is known as the large non-energy intensive sector – i.e. organisations like hospitals, universities, businesses and at least large local authorities. The CRC will include direct and indirect carbon emission, exclude emissions covered by current voluntary trading schemes, and any authority needing to increase its emissions over its allowance will have to buy credits from those polluting less. • an Energy Performance Certificate for all sizable council buildings – e.g. offices, schools, libraries. The EPC will show the current energy rating of the building and steps that could improve its energy efficiency.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all social housing to comply with the Code for Sustainable Homes, and all new homes to be carbon zero by 2016. • More local planning encouragement of decentralised electricity generation and microgeneration, such as small-scale wind or solar power.
May 24	<p>The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) publishes its <i>Waste Strategy for England 2007</i>, recording progress made since the 2000 Strategy (e.g. increased recycling and composting, a slowing rate of waste growth and less landfill), and giving additional emphasis to the impact of waste on climate change and to the shared nature of waste management responsibility.</p> <p>At the top of what the Strategy terms the ‘waste hierarchy’ must be waste prevention, but for the UK especially a major priority has to be the continuing diversion of waste away from landfill sites – possibly through the use of local charges to incentivise householders to reduce and recycle their waste, as suggested in the Lyons Report.</p> <p>Interestingly – as an eloquent illustration of the financial constraints placed upon UK local authorities – councils are currently prohibited from charging for collection of waste, except in specific cases. If legislation were to remove this restriction, the choice of so-called ‘save as you throw’ schemes considered by local authorities would be between those based on volume, collection frequency, or, most contentiously, weight, where an electronic chip (transponder) weighs the bin and identifies it with a particular property. All schemes, the Strategy insists, should be revenue neutral, with the payments received by recycling householders balanced by the penalties on non-recyclers. There would also have to local resident approval, and seriously tough measures to prevent fly-tipping.</p>
May 22	<p>DEFRA publishes <i>Guidance for Local Authorities on Implementing the Biodiversity Duty</i> that all public authorities have, as from October, under Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.</p> <p>Local authorities have a new duty to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity – the variety of life on earth, including all species of plants and animals and their complex eco-systems – in exercising their functions, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing and influencing local policies and strategies; • planning and development control; • owning and managing their estates; • procurement; • education, awareness raising and advisory functions.

<p>June 19</p>	<p>Local Government Minister, Phil Woolas, praises local authorities for figures showing that the collection of council tax and non-domestic rates has improved for the seventh successive year. English councils had collected £18.9 billion in 2006-07 council taxes: £12 million more than if collection rates had remained the same as last year. To the Minister, these statistics confirmed the recent Lyons Report’s view that council tax was not broken as a system and should be retained.</p> <p>It would appear that Ministers miss no opportunity to exploit this ‘not broken’ quote as justification for their instant dismissal of Sir Michael Lyons’ other calls for additional tax bands for the most expensive and cheapest homes and a complete property revaluation. The quote appears in para.7.116 of the final report, and, as deployed by Ministers, ignores his repeated concerns about the tax – its inherent unfairness and perceived unfairness, the unsustainable burden on lower income households, and the dishonesty and perversity of capping. Never quoted either is para.7118: “Reform of council tax, and council tax benefit, are a key part of the picture and should be the priority in the short term.” (emphasis added).</p>
<p>June 21</p>	<p>The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) publishes a White Paper, <i>Care Matters: Time for Change</i>, outlining measures the Department will take, together with local authorities and other delivery partners, to improve life outcomes of children and young people in care. The White Paper derives directly from an October 2006 Green Paper, also entitled <i>Care Matters</i>, and ensuing consultations. It makes numerous recommendations on topics such as the management and monitoring of care placements, improving foster care, and particularly raising educational standards of ‘looked-after’ children, which collectively serve to emphasise the corporate parenting role of the top-tier and unitary authorities responsible for children’s services.</p> <p>Corporate parenting means that a local authority as a whole (not just its social services department) has a legal as well as moral responsibility for the children in its care, and a duty to provide the same kind of support that any good parent would provide for their own children. In furtherance of this corporate responsibility, relevant local authorities were required by the Children’s Act 2004 to appoint by January 2008 a Director of Children’s Services (DCS) and a Lead Member (Councillor) for Children’s Services, who between them are professionally and politically accountable for the authority’s delivery of its educational and social services functions in respect of children.</p>
<p>June 25</p>	<p>The Local Government Information Unit (LGIU) publishes <i>The role of councillors: Report of an Inquiry</i> by the All-Party Parliamentary Local Government Group that the LGIU itself, in the person of Jo Dungey, supported and authored. The report is timed so as to inform the deliberations of the Councillors Commission, due to report at the end of the year, and includes examples of good practice, as well as a series of immediately implementable recommendations on aspects of the role of councillors and how it might be made more effective. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promoting decentralisation to neighbourhoods, including delegated budgets to ward councillors. It is undeniable that some non-executive councillors have struggled to come to terms with their much changed role(s) under the post-2000 political management arrangements, but the decentralisation/area arrangements that many councils have introduced have been generally welcomed, and this recommendation is an acknowledgement of their success. • Supporting councillors’ role as Community Champions, and ensuring that their

	<p>local knowledge can have a real impact on strategic decision-making, on Local Strategic Partnerships and Local Area Agreements – areas of ‘local governance’ now increasingly seen as the preserve of officers and executive members.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring, as a minimum, a standard of basic support for councillors, including support for childcare and specific support for disabled councillors. • Continuing progress on member development and training, with a defined minimum level of training entitlement for each councillor and access to an individual training budget.
June 27	<p>Gordon Brown becomes Prime Minister after Tony Blair makes his final appearance in the House of Commons and tenders his resignation to the Queen. In the extensive governmental changes – in both structures and personnel – announced over the following few days, Hazel Blears, MP for the constituency of Salford (near Manchester), becomes Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government – the third minister to have Cabinet responsibility for local government in the two years since the 2005 General Election. Phil Woolas is succeeded as Minister for Local Government by John Healey.</p> <p>The new PM’s most radical structural change has been to split the former Department for Education and Skills into two:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Department for Children, Schools and Families, which will have responsibility for all education up to the age of 19 and will seek to coordinate all policy relating to children and young people; and • the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, which takes over science, innovation and research from the Department of Trade and Industry (its remaining functions going to the new Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform), and will be deal with all higher and most further education. <p>It is always interesting to see how different countries organise their government departments and cabinet representations – Japan, for instance, with its conglomerate department of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, and its linking of Health, Labour and Welfare, compared to the increasing UK tendency to identify client groups: women, children, families (see April 18), schools, universities – as if to persuade them that they are really are a government priority. In this respect, universities are not unlike local government: cabinet status is appreciated, possibly even suggesting increased funding; the almost certain increased central government interest that will accompany it – in this instance in research funding – is less welcome.</p> <p>Two other innovations with relevance for local government are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • giving the new Housing Minister [Yvette Cooper until she in turn was succeeded in January 2008 by Caroline Flint] the right to attend Cabinet, but without voting rights. There is a UK statute that restricts the size of Cabinet to 22 salaried Ministers, and this arrangement is a way of emphasising the priority the Prime Minister wishes to be seen to be giving to housing without having otherwise to alter Cabinet membership and portfolios. • appointing a Minister for each of the 8 English regions, each with its own parliamentary select committee. It is a modest attempt to address the English regional ‘problem’ left by the North East’s 2004 referendum rejection of a directly elected Regional Assembly, and the ministerial brief is to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ provide regions with a sense of strategic direction, particularly in relation to economic development;

- give them a greater voice in ‘Whitehall’ and central government;
- ensure that Government policy takes account of regions’ particular needs;
- raise the profile of central government in the regions.

There must, however, be doubts as to how effective this new regional voice is likely to be, given that all the regional ministers are already departmental ministers in their own right, and of course it does nothing at all to address the post-referendum regional democratic deficit.

Gordon Brown’s Cabinet – formed June 2007, reshuffled Jan 2008 (23 full members)

Title (S o S = Secretary of State) * = new/restructured department (July '07)	* = In Cab. since 1997 ** = Dep L'ship cand. † = unpaid	Ministerial team (116)	M/F (75/41)
PRIME MINISTER, First Lord of the Treasury	GORDON BROWN*	1	1/-
Chancellor of the Exchequer	Alistair Darling*	5 ½ (2 in Cab)	1½/4
S o S for Foreign & Commonwealth Affairs	David Miliband	5½	4½/1
S o S for Justice & Lord Chancellor (inc. Law Officers)	Jack Straw*	9	5/4
Home Secretary	Jacqui Smith	5½	3½/2
S o S for Defence + Scotland	Des Browne	5	4/1
S o S for Health	Alan Johnson**	6	4/2
S o S for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs	Hilary Benn (m)**	5	4/1
S o S for International Development	Douglas Alexander	3½	2½/1
S o S for Business, Enterprise & Regulatory Reform*	John Hutton	5	4/1
Leader of House of Commons, Minister for Women	Harriet Harman**	3	-/3
S o S for Work & Pensions	James Purnell	6	5/1
S o S for Transport	Ruth Kelly	4	2/2
S o S for Innovation, Universities & Skills*	John Denham	5	5/-
S o S for Communities & Local Government	Hazel Blears**	6	3/3
S o S for Children, Schools and Families*	Ed Balls	5	4/1
Minister for the Cabinet Office (inc. M for London, the Olympics)	Ed Miliband	4	3/1
S o S for Culture, Media & Sport	Andy Burnham	3	2/1
S o S for Northern Ireland	Shaun Woodward†	2	2/-
S o S for Wales	Paul Murphy	2	2/-
Chief Secretary to the Treasury	Yvette Cooper	Counted above	
Leader of House of Lords	Baroness Ashton	1	-/1
Chief Whip (inc. 8 Whips in House of Lords: 3M/5F)	Geoff Hoon	26	16/10

Note: 5 additional Ministers attend Cabinet meetings

Additional notes: M /F = male/female;
½ = a Minister whose responsibilities are divided between two departments.

June

The month of June 2007 will be long remembered as one of the wettest in British meteorological history. Many places received a normal month’s rainfall in 24 hours, and there was **extensive flooding**, especially in the Midlands and Northern England. At least 11 people died, thousands of businesses were affected, and tens of thousands of homes. In such emergencies, the speed and comprehensiveness of the response provided by **multi-functional councils** in affected areas earn local government and its employees some of their most positive public recognition and media coverage. In this instance, they provided rest centre accommodation, refreshment and advice for residents forced to leave their homes, sandbags to protect threatened properties, and helplines for people wanting to enquire about evacuated relatives, as well as taking lead responsibility for clean-up operations.

<p>July 1</p>	<p>The law implementing the WEEE Directive (The European Community Directive on Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment) finally comes into force, after years of Government delay, but with many councils claiming that businesses in their areas are still not meeting their responsibilities. The contrast with Japan – whose equivalent to the WEEE Directive, the Home Appliances Recycling Law 1998, was the first ‘take-back’ law in the world – is a striking and embarrassing one.</p> <p>The legislation requires electrical goods retailers to offer customers a free in-store take-back service on a ‘like for like’ basis, or to help fund the expansion of WEEE collection points. But while Japanese manufacturers (we are told) take a holistic view of recycling and see the take-back, dismantling and re-use of materials as natural stages in a product’s life cycle, many UK companies see it more as an additional cost burden and are reluctant to comply. This leaves councils responsible, at least in the short term, for collecting and recycling old electrical goods, and their council tax payers potentially liable for what should be a producer cost, without knowing how or even if they will be reimbursed.</p>
<p>July 3</p> <p>(see also Oct. 19)</p>	<p>The new Prime Minister and Jack Straw, Secretary of State for Justice and Lord Chancellor, present a Green Paper on constitutional reform, <i>The Governance of Britain</i>. The Paper talks of a tripartite relationship between government, parliament and local communities – the latter being apparently quite distinguishable from local elected local councils – and of devolving power directly to local people. So, while as a whole the Green Paper has a strong national and parliamentary emphasis, it contains a number of proposals both directly and indirectly relevant to local government, of which probably the most notable are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • proposals for extending direct democracy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ enabling local residents to question their councils’ decisions through what was called in the 2006 White Paper a ‘Community Call for Action’, following which their councillor could raise the issue through the Overview and Scrutiny procedure; ○ requiring local authorities to consult on major decisions through mechanisms such as citizens’ juries; ○ introducing local referendums on spending decisions. ○ requiring local authorities to consider and respond to petitions from local communities; ○ enabling local communities to apply for devolved or delegated budgets to fund community projects; • the commitment to establish a concordat between central and local government, setting out formally for the first time the rights and responsibilities of local government.
<p>July 3</p>	<p>Sir Simon Milton (Conservative) is elected Chairman of the LGA, after Lord ‘Sandy’ Bruce-Lockhart (also Conservative) completes his three-year term of office.</p> <p>Sir Simon has been Leader of Westminster City Council since 2000, and as LGA Chairman will be in effect the national voice of local government in England. He was first elected to Westminster Council in 1988, at which time he would have been considered a young Thatcherite, probably envisaging local government as a stepping-stone to a career in Parliament. Having stayed in local government, he is nowadays a centrist, almost ‘Cameroon’ Conservative, and he sees the political climate of London local government as having undergone a comparable transformation from the party</p>

	<p>polarisation of the 1980s. In an interview earlier in the year he suggested that: “frankly, there is now not much ideological difference between the ways Conservative Westminster and Labour Newham (an East London borough) are run ... we’ve all converged”. Which may of course partly explain why election turnouts were higher in the 1980s than they are today.</p> <p>In his inaugural speech to the LGA Annual Conference in Birmingham, Sir Simon called for the new Prime Minister to devolve housing, economic development and health powers to councils, enabling them to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • deliver an extra 500,000 new affordable homes by 2020; • help create 1 million new jobs and 10,000 new businesses; and • develop a Local Health Service alongside the National Health Service.
July 10	<p>Local government workers from across England and Wales lobby their MPs at the Houses of Parliament demanding ‘Equal Pay Now – Funding for Local Government’. The issue of equal pay for men and women dates back to the so-called Single Status Agreement (SSA) negotiated in 1997 between the National Joint Council for Local Government Services and trade unions. It sought to rectify the historical gender pay gap in local government, where 75% of employees are women, by creating non-discriminatory grading structures that were supposed to be introduced by councils by April 2007.</p> <p>In fact, the Equal Opportunities Commission has calculated that there is still in local government a pay gap of 17% for women working full-time and a 38% pay gap for part-timers. Many councils have hardly started the process of conducting the necessary Equal Pay Reviews, while others have attempted to implement single status on a no- or limited-cost basis: changing working patterns and cutting unsocial hours to pay for basic rate pay increases, or cutting other employees’ pay rates. All in local government, however, acknowledge that the total of between £3 billion and £5 billion (635 – 1060 billion JPY) needed to implement single status fully is far beyond the resources of local authorities and requires significant central government support. That is the aim of the lobbyists: to try to persuade the Government to release funding to enable councils to conduct proper pay reviews, fund equal pay structures, and compensate women for past discrimination.</p>
July 11	<p>The Prime Minister made a statement introducing <i>The Government’s Draft Legislative Programme</i>, which outlines, for the first time in this form, all the major Bills that the Government is planning to introduce in the next session of Parliament.</p> <p>This is one of the first manifestations of the constitutional change proposed in the <i>Governance of Britain</i> Green Paper and is designed to make the legislative process more open and accessible. It means that, some four months before the Queen’s Speech which will officially open the parliamentary session, local government knows at least something of the content of, for example, the Bills concerning Children and Young Persons, Climate Change, Education and Skills, Health and Social Care, Housing and Regeneration, Local Transport, and Planning Reform.</p>
July 17	<p>The Treasury publishes a <i>Review of Sub-national Economic Development and Regeneration</i> – one of the policy reviews announced in the 2006 Budget that would inform the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review.</p> <p>The Review’s most prominent, if not exactly unexpected, proposal is the Government’s intention to abolish Regional Assemblies in their present form. The Regional Development Associations (RDAs) will have executive responsibility for</p>

	<p>developing an integrated regional strategy, working closely with local authorities and partners, and, in the absence of the Assemblies, local authorities will also be responsible for effective scrutiny of RDA performance. These changes would amount to a significant strengthening of local authorities’ economic development role – a key element in what Lyons defined as their ‘place-shaping’ responsibilities – as would several of the Review’s other proposals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a statutory economic development duty requiring upper-tier local authorities to carry out a local economic assessment that would support regional economic strategies, local sustainable community strategies, and Local Area Agreements; • reform and simplification of the Local Authority Business Growth Incentive (LABGI) scheme that allows local authorities to spend a proportion of increases in business rate revenues on their own priorities; • reform of Neighbourhood Renewal Funding to target it more intensively on areas of particularly acute deprivation rather than on local authority areas as a whole; • direct linking of the new local government performance framework to national Public Service Agreements and indicators; • Regional Development Agencies to delegate responsibility for spending to local authorities or sub-regions wherever possible; • the Government to work with interested bodies to explore the potential for allowing groups of local authorities to establish statutory sub-regional authorities; • a single regional strategy for each region setting out economic, social, and environmental objectives; • each region to be set a regional growth objective which will define a simplified outcome and growth-focused framework. <p>While there are clearly areas of considerable opacity among some of these recommendations – about how relations between RDAs and several dozen local authorities would actually work in practice, about the principle as well as reformability of LABGI, and about the continued dearth of any serious democratic accountability – the initial reaction of local government is generally positive.</p>
July 19	<p>The Home Office publishes its new 4-year crime strategy, <i>Cutting Crime</i>, the most relevant sections for local government being those directed at the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) [Community Safety Partnerships in Wales] that nowadays constitute one of the most prominent examples of local partnership working. Since 1998, there has been a statutory duty for ‘responsible authorities’ – i.e. police and local authorities, fire and rescue authorities, primary care trusts – to work in partnership with other local organisations “to develop and implement strategies to tackle crime, drug misuse, and other anti-social behaviour adversely affecting the local environment”.</p> <p>The White Paper proposes that, while CDRPs should have greater local flexibility, with fewer centrally-set performance targets, they will be expected to improve and co-ordinate their procedures in various ways, as well as giving greater emphasis to neighbourhood policing and to ‘engagement’ through ‘face the people’ sessions with their local communities. Local government’s broad reaction is that, while not a particularly coherent document, the crime strategy appears to reinforce the messages</p>

	coming now from several central government departments that there should be less central direction, more explicit recognition of the third sector, and greater policy input from local citizens and communities.
July 19	Grist environmental newswire , produced by an independent environmental news organisation in Seattle (US), places London seventh in its (entirely unofficial) list of the World's Greenest Cities . Reykjavik (Iceland) is ranked 1 st , on the basis of its hydrogen-fuelled buses and 100% reliance on hydropower and geothermal energy for heat and electricity. Other highly placed cities are Portland (Oregon, US), Curitiba (Brazil), Malmö (Sweden) and Vancouver (Canada), but, sad to report, no Japanese city makes the top 20. In addition to the congestion charge, the judges commend the London Mayor's Climate Change Action Plan , with its 20-year commitment to switch 25% of its power to more efficient, locally generated sources and to cut carbon dioxide emissions by 60%.
July 23	The DCLG publishes a Housing Green Paper, <i>Homes for the Future: More Affordable, More Sustainable</i> . Housing was a key issue in the Labour Party's deputy leadership campaign, and Gordon Brown had already signalled – in his early Prime Ministerial speeches and by having his new Housing Minister (Yvette Cooper) attend Cabinet (see June 27) – that it will be a major concern of his too. The headline figures in the White Paper appear to confirm that councils will have both a strategic and providing role in relation to housing, after some years of anticipating that the latter in particular might disappear completely (see Wilson and Game, 2006, pp. 135-38): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an increase of 2 million homes by 2016 and 3 million by 2020, requiring ... • an increase in housing supply from 185,000 to 240,000 p.a., to include: • 70,000 more 'affordable' homes a year by 2011 – i.e. low-cost and subsidised housing affordable to people unable to rent or purchase on the open market. Roles envisaged for local authorities include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identifying sufficient and appropriate land for housing development – including bids for the new small, zero-carbon 'eco-towns' on 'brownfield' sites, as proposed by the Government earlier in the year; • assisting developers with planning consent; • leading and co-ordinating provision of the necessary infrastructure; • bidding, in association with local partners, for a new Social Housing Grant (SHG), and – though this is more tentative – undertaking development themselves out of their Housing Revenue Accounts.
July 24	The House of Commons Public Accounts Committee (PAC) publishes a report on Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour . Politicians of all parties in recent years have become increasingly concerned with anti-social behaviour, which the Home Office now differentiates into four categories: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • misuse of public space: drug dealing and abuse, street drinking, aggressive begging, prostitution, vehicle nuisance; • disregard for personal/community well-being: noise, rowdy and nuisance behaviour, inappropriate vehicle use; • acts directed at people: intimidation, harassment; • environmental damage: criminal damage, vandalism, litter, etc. The PAC found that there are at least 10 different interventions – Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs), Individual Support Orders, parenting contracts and orders, etc. – available variously to the police, community support officers, the courts, magistrates, social services and other local agencies, that are used in apparently

	<p>comparable local areas with varying frequency and effect. A key recommendation of the report is that, before increasing this number still further, the Home Office should take stock of the measures already available, consider whether all are really necessary, and how those that are might be better understood.</p>
<p>July 25</p>	<p>Local Government Minister, John Healey, announces that 9 new English unitary authorities will come into operation in 2009.</p> <p>The Minister’s announcement represents the latest, but far from final, stage in a process launched in the 2006 White Paper. That Paper asserted that councils in two-tier areas of local government in England “need to find new governance arrangements which overcome the risks of confusion, duplication and inefficiency between tiers and can meet the particular challenges faced by <i>small districts with small budgets</i> or tightly constrained boundaries” (para. 3.54 – emphasis added). [An ‘average-sized’ district council, it should be remembered, has a population of about 100,000 or about 6 times the average-sized municipality elsewhere in Western Europe, and an annual budget approaching £100 million (about 21 billion JPY). ‘Small’ was the term used in connection with the Local Government Act 2000 for districts with populations of under 85,000 who would not be required to introduce ‘separate executive’ systems of political management.] The White Paper then invited all local authorities in such two-tier areas “to make proposals for unitary local government” that could be judged to enhance strategic leadership, neighbourhood empowerment, and value for money, could command a broad cross-section of local support, and be affordable from the affected councils’ existing resources.</p> <p>The invitation to bid for unitary status was included in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill, and, considerably exceeding Ministerial expectations, 26 bids were received by the January closing date. 16 were shortlisted in March, and reduced down to the final successful 9 announced by the Minister:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cornwall, Durham, Northumberland, Shropshire and Wiltshire will become county-wide unitaries – marked by thick oval on the map below; • Bedford (Bedfordshire), Exeter (Devon) and Ipswich (Suffolk) will be borough/city-based unitaries, their respective counties remaining otherwise two-tier – marked by arrow + thin oval on map; • Chester will be part of a 3-district Chester and West Cheshire unitary in a 2-unitary Cheshire – marked by arrow + medium-thick oval on map. <p>In one sense, none of these authorities can regard the Minister’s announcement as anything other than provisional, for the Bill embodying the unitary proposals has still many weeks in Parliament before being enacted, and some of the district councils destined to disappear have indicated that they may take the decisions to judicial review. The Minister himself also indicates that Bedford, Chester, Exeter and Ipswich have been asked to submit further information to demonstrate conclusively the viability of their proposals”. In addition, Norwich City Council (Norfolk), though not meeting the Government’s criteria, is also judged to have “a strong case” for unitary status, and the Minister has asked the Boundary Commission to advise on an alternative unitary proposal based on revised council boundaries.</p> <p>As has been clear from the terms of the debate even before the White Paper, this drive towards ever larger units of so-called ‘local’ government (like the sharing of services – see May 1 above) is prompted entirely by calculations of efficiency savings. Prominent in the Minister’s announcement, therefore, is the estimate that the 9 new unitaries could make annual savings of over £150 million (31.6 billion JPY), “which can be used to directly improve front-line services or to reduce council tax bills”.</p>

<p>August 7 (see also Oct. 11)</p>	<p>The House of Commons Communities and Local Government (Select) Committee publishes a report, <i>Local Government Finance: Supplementary Business Rate</i>, which generally endorses the Lyons Report’s recommendation that local authorities be given the power to levy a locally determined Supplementary Business Rate or, as it later became known, a Business Rate Supplement.</p> <p>Local government reaction is mixed, for the LGA’s official position is that, in the interests of a healthier central-local balance of funding, and to provide councils with the necessary resources for local infrastructural investment, business rates (‘nationalised’ under the Thatcher Government in 1990) should be returned completely to local control. Lyons’ judgement was that now was not the time for what would be a technically difficult operation, and that enabling authorities to levy a modest SBR in the form of a marginal supplement to the National Non-Domestic Rate (NNDR) was preferable and more feasible.</p> <p>By contrast, the conclusions of a second CLG Committee report published at the same time, on Council Tax Benefit (CTB), accord almost completely with views widely held in local government that in both name and content this part of the system is seriously unsatisfactory. The purpose of CTB is to reduce the tax liability of low-income households, and it should therefore be treated as a tax allowance – an integral part of the tax system to which qualifying recipients are entitled – rather than a benefit, with its implications of providing income support for those in need and that has to be separately claimed for. A consequence is that CTB has the lowest take-up rate of any means-tested benefit, with around a third of those entitled to claim not doing so and the state thereby ‘saving’ a total of £1.8 million (380 million JPY). In addition, it is widely accepted that the rules governing eligibility are too restrictively drawn and that, even when claimed, the benefit is not reaching all those it was supposed to help. Echoing the Lyons Report, the CLG Committee concludes that reform of the CTB is a matter of urgency.</p>
<p>August 17</p>	<p>Dr. Victoria Barbary, in a New Local Government Network free e-pamphlet – Local Identity: The role of local entitlement cards in public service delivery http://www.nlgn.org.uk/public/wp-content/uploads/local-identity-_white-paper.pdf - argues that councils should consider a ‘local ID Card’ scheme to combat identity fraud and give better access to public services.</p> <p>The proposal is a response to the Government’s ongoing and highly controversial commitment to an eventually compulsory national ID scheme for all UK residents over 16. The opposition is on various grounds: cost, alleged ineffectiveness in dealing with terrorism, civil liberties, and the possibility of discrimination against ethnic minorities – an accusation also levelled some 10 years ago at Japan’s requirement that foreign residents carry ID cards at all times.</p> <p>The NLGN case is that a locally administered ‘entitlement card’ would be cheaper and more practical, being able to be used as proof of identity and also giving access to many local services, benefits, public transport and local leisure facilities. The cards could operate in a manner similar to internet banking, allowing users to update online their ‘biographical footprint’ – the verified identity details contained on the card - using an account number PIN, password, or other identifiers. Citizens would thus retain ownership of their identity and ensure that it is not altered without their consent.</p>

<p><u>Sept. 18</u></p>	<p>The DCLG publishes its initial – and what local government sees as encouragingly non-prescriptive – guidance for the negotiation of the new Local Area Agreements (LAAs): the means through which the Government claims it will be seen to be ‘letting go’ of central control and giving councils and communities more power to decide their own priorities. As announced in the 2006 White Paper, this second generation of LAAs will be part of a much streamlined performance system for local government, with a new Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) replacing Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) and most existing performance indicators (PIs) replaced with a single set of not more than 200.</p> <p>LAAs are 3-year agreements between the main public sector agencies in an area – acting through the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) – and central government, as represented through the Government Offices for the Regions (see Wilson and Game, 2006, pp. 372-76). The LSP agrees, after consultation with local people, a Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) for its area comprising various prioritised policy objectives – e.g. tackling guns and gangs, getting people into work, improving maternity services, support for older people. The LAA then translates these objectives into up to 35 realisable targets, drawn from the Government’s new and severely reduced set of around 200 performance indicators, to secure the identified service improvements.</p>
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<p>October 2</p>	<p>The LGA publicises examples of councils, particularly in rural areas, that in the past few years have started working in partnership with local businesses and community organisations to provide post office services, and demands that the Post Office should consult local people as up to 2,500 post offices, out of a total of about 14,300 across the country, face closure.</p> <p>Post office services in the UK have yet to dominate a general election campaign, as happened in Japan in 2005, but they are still capable of constituting a contentious political issue. Unlike many other former state monopolies, the Royal Mail was not privatised by the Thatcher Governments during the 1980s, remaining a public limited company wholly owned by the Government. In recent years, however, its subsidiary, Post Offices Ltd., has lost its monopoly over letter collection and distribution, and this, coupled with the many other changes in the way one-time post office business is now conducted, has meant the closure of post offices in many rural communities.</p>
<p>October 5</p>	<p>The DCLG publishes the final report of the Government’s commissioned evaluation of the political management strand of what has become known as its Local Government Modernisation Agenda (LGMA). The 5-year research study was undertaken by ELG (Evaluating Local Governance, New Constitutions and Ethics) – a team of academics headed by Prof. Gerry Stoker, then of the University of Manchester (www.elgnce.org.uk), and their final report is <i>The New Council Constitutions: The Outcomes and Impact of the Local Government Act 2000</i>. Ministers’ interpretation of the evaluation is that the executive-based arrangements introduced under the 2000 Act have led to “more visible and effective leadership, faster decision-making and better public services”.</p>
<p>October 9</p>	<p>The Treasury publishes its much delayed and already partly revealed <i>Pre-Budget Report and Comprehensive Spending Review 2007 (CSR07)</i>.</p> <p>Government spending reviews – setting out government departments’ performance frameworks and expenditure limits (DELs) – take place supposedly every two years, but cover three-year periods. This review was delayed from 2006 on the grounds that it would be more comprehensive, setting the financial framework for the next decade of public service provision. Several independent reviews, intended to inform CSR07, have already been published, some already referred to: the Lyons Inquiry into the funding, role and function of local government, the Barker reviews of Land Use Planning, the Eddington Transport study; plus the important Stern review of the Economics of Climate Change.</p> <p>The national economic headlines are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The UK economy has grown strongly in 2007, reaching 3.5% over the year. But the Treasury has had to cut its March forecast for 2008 from 2.5-3% to 2-2.5%, prior to an expected return to the previous rate in succeeding years. • Borrowing will rise steeply, to meet the Government’s spending plans, which will mean further public sector efficiency gains and asset sales. • Public spending growth will halve over the next 3 years, to a real terms average of 2.1% p.a. – i.e. at less than the overall growth rate. Even for health, the Government’s highest public service priority, the annual growth rate – averaging 7.2% since 1999 – will almost halve, to 3.7%. <p>The local government headlines:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “A fair and affordable settlement” – in the Government’s view – of just under 1% p.a. on top of inflation. Whereas government grants to local government over

	<p>the past 10 years increased by 39% in real terms – an annual growth rate of nearly 4% over the rate of inflation – the DEL for local government in the next three years will grow by just 2.9%.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This, the CSR calculates, should enable councils to deliver an overall council tax increase of “substantially” below 5% - an outcome that the Government can, of course, ensure through its statutory powers to ‘cap’ any council’s proposed spending and council tax increase that it deems to be ‘excessive’. • The settlement also delivers £2 billion (420 billion JPY) over 3 years for neighbourhood and local renewal programmes – targeted, as indicated in the Sub-national Review (July 17), on the most deprived areas – and £50 million (10,500 million JPY) to promote greater community cohesion and integration. • Published alongside CSR07, the <i>Value for Money Delivery Plan</i> requires from local authorities annual net savings of £4.9 billion (1,030 billion JPY) by 2010-11 (up from £3 billion (630 billion JPY) p.a. in the present spending period), through a combination of ‘smarter procurement’, business process improvements, collaboration initiatives, and better asset management. <p>Local government’s dilemma on learning the details of the settlement was that, having known all but the detail for months, it would seem disingenuous to appear too shocked. The annual 1% real increase, however, is seriously harsh, and gives the impression of the Government having largely ignored the additional financial pressures placed upon councils by demographic change – particularly the growing numbers of elderly requiring care – and by Ministers’ own policies, such as the provision of children’s services outside school hours and the increased costs of waste management and recycling. Nor, has there been any response to local government’s argument over what it sees as the unduly high proportion of savings that are required to be ‘cashable’ – from reducing the resources required to achieve a given outcome – as opposed to ‘non-cashable’ – improving outcomes from a given level of resource. Both approaches can deliver service improvements that can lead to cost savings.</p> <p>Even DCLG Minister Hazel Blears concedes that the settlement is “not super-generous”, and LGA Chairman, Sir Simon Milton, describes it as the “worst settlement in a decade”. He forecasts that, notwithstanding the real terms grant increase, in practice there will be a shortfall, with the council tax payer left again to pick up the bill.</p>
October 9	<p>Among the many documents published alongside CSR07, with perhaps some of the most positive news for local government, are a Treasury White Paper, <i>Business Rate Supplements</i> and a consultation paper on reforms to the Local Authority Business Growth Incentives scheme (LABGI), <i>Better incentives for local economic growth</i>. Between them, these two documents’ proposals are intended to boost councils’ economic development activity, which, particularly under the new Prime Minister, is seen as one of local government’s most important functions.</p> <p>The Lyons Inquiry, to the disappointment of many in local government, recommended that the existing system of business rates be retained – that is, as a tax set by central government at a uniform national rate, rather than one set as well as collected locally. Lyons did, however, advocate local flexibilities in the setting of supplementary business rates to support economic development – a path on which the Government had indeed already embarked.</p> <p>It introduced one form of flexibility with Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) in 2003, enabling local authorities to introduce a supplementary business rate subject to</p>

	<p>a local ballot of businesses. The funds raised are used to support specific, time-limited projects, such as town centre improvements. There are currently nearly 70 in existence, and they are regarded as a successful initiative. LABGI, by contrast, is less well regarded. It seeks to incentivise local authorities to support business growth by returning to them part of the growth in business rates as indicated by changes in local rateable value, but in its unreformed state it is seen as too complex and unpredictable, and it is to be suspended, pending the results of the consultation.</p> <p>The Business Rate Supplement can thus be seen as the third in a series of these flexibilities introduced by the Government – in this case, as the White Paper puts it, a “new power for local authorities” to raise and retain local supplements on the national business rate in order to fund projects that will promote economic development. The Supplement undoubtedly will provide some authorities with welcome additional funding for transport schemes – most notably for the GLA to fund the Crossrail project of new railway connections under central London – business facilities and town centre development. The general tone of the White Paper, however, and certainly its key proposals, amount to a framework of limitations on local authorities and protections for businesses – the justification of which is never really spelt out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • revenue from supplements will only be used to support additional investment in economic development in specified service areas; • there will be a national upper limit of 2p in the £ - i.e. 2% of a property’s assessed rateable value – which is half the level suggested by Lyons; • there will be exemptions for smaller businesses; • the right to levy a supplement will only be available to upper tier authorities – i.e. not the London boroughs.
Oct. 11	<p>The DCLG publishes in headline form the list of 198 Performance Indicators (PIs) to come into force for local councils in April 2008. This list – “slashed”, as CLG Secretary Hazel Blears puts it, from the present total of roughly 1,200 PIs – fulfils one of the pledges in the October 2006 White Paper, and is the main element in what the minister calls a “radical re-engineering of the relationship between the state and local councils”. Other “new freedoms” include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • up to £5 billion (1,000 billion JPY) transferred out of ‘ring-fenced’ budgets, allowing councils to shift resources to their own local priorities; • Business Rates Supplements (BSRs) – a new power for local authorities and the Greater London Authority (GLA) to raise and retain, for spending on economic development projects, a limited local supplement on the National Business Rate paid by larger local businesses. <p>The Minister sees this package as comprising “unprecedented freedoms, financial flexibility and revenue raising powers” (my emphasis) – leaving local government, while naturally welcoming the increased local discretion, wondering in which other European local government systems 198 centrally determined PIs and a tightly qualified 2% local tax supplement would be seen as something greatly to celebrate.</p>
Oct. 19	<p>The DCLG publishes an Empowerment Action Plan – detailing how it will implement its pledge to devolve power to local communities and, hopefully, increase the proportion of people (just 37% in the 2007 Citizenship Survey) who feel they can influence decisions affecting their local area. Measures include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • naming 18 local authorities – two per region – as Empowerment Champions: councils with an existing record in involving local people that can spearhead a regeneration of local democracy by sharing their experience with others; • requiring all local authorities by 2012 to have Community Kitties in a step

	<p>towards what the Plan terms “participatory budgeting”: people being given a direct say in how public funding should be spent on local projects – e.g. neighbourhood wardens to tackle drug dealing, traffic calming in local streets;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enabling councils to devolve, by 2010, up to 5% of their youth services budget for young people to decide for themselves how the money is spent; • accelerating the transfer of local authority assets – e.g. disused buildings, old swimming pools – to local community groups; • raising the status of public petitions to provide more opportunities for people to trigger action on their priorities; • creating a new statutory duty requiring local authorities to inform, consult and involve local people in local decisions, policies and services.
Oct. 23	<p>The Greater London Authority Act receives Royal Assent. The Act is an affirmation of the Government’s belief that since its creation in 2000 the GLA has been a success, and it gives a broad package of additional powers to both the Mayor of London and the London Assembly. In particular, the Mayor will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • publish a London housing strategy, setting out his strategic housing investment priorities for London; • be able to determine planning applications of strategic importance in London; • have a duty to address climate change, and publish a London climate change mitigation and energy strategy. <p>Though remaining a weak and rather ineffectual check on the powers and actions of the Mayor, the Assembly will also have a duty to address climate change, and will be able to hold confirmation hearings in order to scrutinise Mayoral candidates for key appointments.</p> <p>The Act also allows the establishment of a London Waste and Recycling Board to promote the production of less waste and encourage recycling.</p>
Oct. 23	<p>The Sustainable Communities Act receives Royal Assent. This is an unusual example of a potentially very significant piece of legislation piloted through Parliament not by Ministers but by an individual MP – the Conservative, Nick Hurd – who had won the right to introduce a Bill of his own choosing by coming first in the annual Private Members’ Bills Ballot. The Act aims to give local people more control over improving their communities, by allowing a representative community panel to suggest, consult on, and negotiate with local authorities ways in which local spending could be better used to improve local services – deliberately defined very broadly, from the post office and local pub to social housing – and improve quality of life.</p> <p>It is designed to tackle the phenomenon known as ‘ghost town Britain’ – the way in which large supermarkets and out-of-town shopping centres have led to the closure in towns and villages of high street shops, banks, post offices, pubs, and even youth clubs and community centres, with a resulting loss of both facilities and a sense of local identity. Local authorities, that generally have strongly supported the Act, should be able to use it to request information on all government spending in their area. Then, if people want, for example, to support local food supply in the form of a regular farmers’ market, they can suggest transferring funding from another government funding stream they think is not currently effective in their community.</p> <p>The Government is expected to launch a consultation process that will do much to determine how effective the Act is in practice, for as it stands, much remains unclear, not least the nature and operation of the vital community panel.</p>

Oct. 30

The **Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act** receives **Royal Assent**. This is the wide-ranging Act that implements many of the proposals in the 2006 White Paper, *Strong and Prosperous Communities*. The Act's main provisions are grouped here according to the White Paper's four principal themes:

1. Creating more effective and accountable local government

- **Structure**

- Councils in two-tier areas to be invited to **bid for unitary status**;
- A simplified process for **creating parish councils**, which can be started by a principal (county or district) council or triggered by a community petition.

- **Executive arrangements**

- All but the smallest councils to adopt **one of two models of governance**:
Leader + cabinet executive: the council elects the leader, who selects cabinet members; or
Mayor + cabinet executive: directly elected mayor selects cabinet.
- A **third option** – a directly elected executive 'slate' – which had been an important part of both the White Paper and the initial Bill, was **abandoned** after being rejected by the House of Lords.
- **All executive responsibilities** to be focused on the leader or mayor – thereby strengthening the individual role of the leader, which is the main purpose of this part of the Act.
- Both leader and mayor to hold office for 4 years.

- **Elections**

- Councils to be able to **vary their form of election** – between 'whole council' elections and elections by halves or thirds (see May 3) – without Ministerial approval.

- **Byelaws**

- **New powers** for councils to make byelaws (local laws used to address specific local problems, but which have had to be confirmed by the Minister) – e.g. for regulating unacceptable public behaviour, or controlling dogs – and enforce them by issuing fixed penalty notices.

- **Ethical standards**

- **Reform of the 'ethical standards' regime** relating to standards of conduct for local government – i.e. the public conduct of elected members, relations between members and officers, etc. – with most investigation of allegations being undertaken locally rather than through the national Standards Board for England, whose future role will be regulatory.

2. Strengthening local strategic leadership and partnership working

- **Local Area Agreements** (see Sept. 18)

- Councils – as 'lead' partners in their Local Strategic Partnerships – to negotiate by June 2008 **new LAAs** with their partners and respective regional Government Offices, on the basis of a reduced number of improvement targets (see Oct 11).
- This list of partners was extended during the passage of the Act to include NHS Health and Foundation trusts, giving LAAs more opportunity fully to consider health issues.

- **Overview and scrutiny**

- Oversight and scrutiny committees to be able to review and scrutinise the action of local partners in regard to improvement targets.

3. Empowering citizens and communities

- **Governance arrangements**
 - Responsibility for creating parishes devolved to local authorities, and extended to include London.
 - Councils to have the power – also added during the passage of the Act – to create **joint waste authorities**, enabling some authorities to work more effectively together to meet waste reduction targets.
- **Councillor (previously Community) Call for Action (CCfA)**
 - Ward councillors to have additional power to refer matters in their area for scrutiny.
- **Health care arrangements**
 - Patient Forums to be replaced by **Local Involvement Networks (LINKs)** – larger networks of user-led and other voluntary, community and faith organisations, ensuring the involvement of more people in the commissioning, provision and scrutiny of local care services.

4. Simplifying and reducing the performance inspection burden

- **Best Value Plans**
 - Removal of requirement for councils to produce Best Value Performance Plans and carry out Best Value reviews.
- **A new performance framework**
 - Replacement of Comprehensive Performance Assessment with a more targeted, risk-based inspection system, and focusing more on local citizens' experiences and perspectives (see Nov 19).

<p>Nov. 6</p>	<p>The Queen's Speech outlines the Government's legislative programme for the new parliamentary session. Bills of particular relevance to local government, all of which, uniquely, had this year been previously announced in the <i>Draft Legislative Programme</i> in July, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Housing and Regeneration Bill – will implement much of the Housing Green Paper (see July 23), including the creation of a new Homes and Communities Agency to facilitate the delivery of new private and social (including council) rented homes and oversee the disposal of public sector land; • The Health and Social Care Bill – will create another new agency, the Care Quality Commission, to strengthen regulation over the increasingly integrated provision of adult health and social care. • The Education and Skills Bill – will, <i>inter alia</i>, raise to 18 (by 2015) the minimum age at which young people can leave education or training. The first cohort of children affected will be those starting secondary school (at age 11) in September 2008, and they will be the first to be taught the new Secondary Curriculum, which will offer new 'flexibilities', in the form of subject-based diplomas, extended project work, pre-apprenticeship programmes, etc. • The Climate Change Bill – will give statutory force to the Government's targets for cutting carbon dioxide emissions by 60% by 2050 (from a 1990 baseline) and by 26-32% by 2020. Councils will be empowered to pilot incentive schemes for household waste minimisation and recycling.
<p>Nov. 16</p>	<p>The Department of Health (DH) publishes its Health and Social Care Bill. Like many others in recent years, this is what is sometimes called a 'portmanteau Bill', bringing together a number of relatively distinct measures. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The establishment of a Care Quality Commission (CQC) to be the new single, integrated regulator for health and social care, replacing three currently separate inspectorates. As well as reflecting the way in which the delivery of health and social care services is itself becoming more integrated, the CQC is also a demonstration of the acknowledgement by Gordon Brown in particular that the 'architecture' of central inspection has got out of hand and is in urgent need of streamlining (see Wilson and Game, pp. 166-68). • The creation of a new independent adjudicator for professional regulation - to make decisions about whether individual health professionals should remain in practice. This reform stems directly from the official inquiry into the Harold Shipman case, in which a General Practitioner was convicted and imprisoned in 2000 as a serial killer and was subsequently found to have killed, over many years, up to 250 of his patients, most of them women. • The updating of public health protection to help prevent and control the spread of serious diseases caused by infection and contamination. • The provision of cash grants to pregnant women in the final stage of pregnancy, in recognition of the additional dietary and other costs faced by expectant mothers.
<p>Nov. 16 (see also July 23)</p>	<p>The DCLG publishes its Housing and Regeneration Bill – intended particularly to drive forward the Government's pledge to provide 3 million 'greener', more affordable new homes by 2020, not least by removing some of the current barriers to councils building their own social housing. The Bill's main measures include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating a Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) to replace the Housing Corporation and English Partnerships. The Agency will have substantial powers – wide-ranging enough, given its lack of democratic accountability, to concern

	<p>some in local government – to invest in and ensure delivery of the Government’s new housing targets.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating a new Social Housing Regulator, the Office for Tenants and Social Landlords (Ofstent), to regulate social housing in England provided by registered providers – i.e. current Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and other bodies who choose to register, though not, at least initially, local authorities. Regulation will cover a wide range of areas, including the nature, extent and quality of the social housing provided, its management and maintenance, and landlords' contribution to the environmental, social and economic well-being of the areas in which their property is situated. • Relaxing aspects of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) subsidy system, which reimburses councils in exchange for their limiting their council housing rents. The Bill envisages certain councils with housing stock being allowed, on application to the Secretary of State, to opt out of the subsidy system and keep rental income from providing new homes.
Nov. 19	<p>The Audit Commission publishes its latest consultation document on the new Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) framework. CAA will replace Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) in 2009, but will have several substantially different emphases:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • on outcomes for and the quality of life of local people, rather than on the output performance of individual services. CAA, therefore, will involve all major local service providers, working both independently but increasingly in partnership - councils, health bodies, police forces, fire and rescue authorities and others. CAA, therefore, will necessarily be a multi-inspectorate activity, rather than very largely the responsibility of the Audit Commission. • on areas – Local Strategic Partnership/Local Area Agreement areas (see Sept 18) – rather than on individual local authorities; • on prospects for the future, more than on the recent past. A key measure will be a forward-looking risk assessment on the prospects for the area and its people; • on the views of local people and partner organisations, more than the judgements of external assessors. <p>In striking contrast to CPA, the CAA will not produce an overall score for each area. Rather – subject of course to the outcome of the present consultations – the assessment framework will have four main elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an area risk assessment – how well the partner organisations understand, assess and respond to the needs and priorities of its communities, now and in the future? • performance information – based on the new set of national PIs; • a use of resources judgement – similar to that in the CPA; • a direction of travel judgement – also similar to that in the CPA, but produced jointly by all the service inspectorates. <p>The general reaction of local government at this stage is cautiously supportive. CAA is a much ‘lighter touch’ process with a much greater emphasis on the views and experiences of those using the services of the inspected agencies, rather than external assessors ‘parachuted in’ for the week. There is, however, real doubt about whether the reporting of CAA ‘results’ will have the public impact the Government seems to be hoping for, and there are questions about the vaguer than average sections of the consultation document; but then there would be even more criticism if a supposed consultation appeared already ‘cut and dried’.</p>

Nov 22	<p>Anthony Brand, in a New Local Government Network free e-pamphlet, <i>Your Police or Mine? Delivering local police leadership</i> - http://www.nlgn.org.uk/public/wp-content/uploads/your-police-or-mine.pdf - calls on the Home Secretary to abolish the 43 police authorities in England and Wales and return their powers to elected local councils.</p> <p>The present police authority structure – broadly matching the areas of administrative counties – dates from 1964, and their membership arrangements – involving a greatly reduced role for local authority members – from 1994. The NLGN’s case is that, particularly in the past decade, policing has become significantly more centralised, with the Home Office having more direct input into local policing plans, and police authorities having little budgetary control or policy influence over Chief Constables.</p> <p>The Home Secretary in 2005, Charles Clarke, declared that the existing 43-force structure was no longer ‘fit for purpose’, and proposed enforced mergers for at least ‘smaller’ forces of under 2,000 regular police officers [There are about 140,000 (full time equivalent) police officers in England and Wales, a considerably higher police:resident ratio than in Japan.] Although a few forces were prepared to merge, the Home Secretary’s plans were generally unpopular with both Chief Constables and their authorities, and in July 2006 Clarke’s successor, John Reid announced that the merger plan had been abandoned.</p> <p>The NLGN pamphlet commends a number of Government proposals to bring local citizens closer to police, including the introduction of Community Support Officers and Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (see July 19). But its central argument is that, if local political leaders had more control over policing policy, citizens would feel less alienated from what would be a more accountable local police force. Brand also rejects the recent Conservative Party proposal of introducing elected police sheriffs, arguing that it is better to coordinate local policing strategy with other local service priorities with council leaders visibly responsible, rather than have a separate American-style elected police chief.</p>
Nov. 23	<p>The Joseph Rowntree Foundation publishes a research report by Saffron James (Young Foundation) and Ed Cox (Local Government Information Unit), <i>Ward councillors and community leadership: a future perspective</i>. Based on detailed research in four case study authorities, the report explores how councillors’ ward representational role is likely to develop over the next five years, in a now established setting of executive-based local government and with councils’ increasing emphasis on neighbourhood and partnership working.</p> <p>The authors identify 6 dimensions of a future ward councillor role, which could, they suggest, serve as a basis of a job description:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political representative: having the ability to connect with all parts of the community and represent everyone fairly, and to balance local concerns with the political demands of the party’s manifesto. • Community advocate: being able to act as an advocate for people from different backgrounds, cultures, and values, and having the confidence to speak freely and challenge the executive. • Community leader: being able to exercise community development skills – to support local projects and initiatives, educate people about local political structures and decisions and the importance of participation, and be sensitive to issues of diversity and equality; if necessary, to be a conflict broker.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service transformer: having a reasonable understanding of the complexities of local government and local service provision, having the confidence and ability to hold service providers to account, and being able to work in partnership with a range of agencies and interests to plan, set and monitor service standards. • Place shaper: being a local figurehead/role-model that people feel they can turn to on issues and problems to do with their immediate local environment, and being able to identify priorities and work with officers and service providers to address such issues and problems; being able to manage delegated locality budgets. • Knowledge champion: being the primary source of local intelligence flowing between the community and the council, having the skills to collect and analyse local information and use it to benefit the community. <p>By any standards, these attributes add up to a challenging and demanding role – one that in the great majority of cases will require additional training, better access to information, and improved officer and general administrative support from councils. There are also implications for councillor recruitment and remuneration, relations between members and officers, and the role of political parties in local government. In the shorter term, the authors principal recommendation is that councils should develop councillor compacts: a two-way agreement between the council and its elected members setting out the council’s expectations of the role and in return setting out a commitment to a standard of support and training. This compact could also be used to explain councillors’ roles to the wider public.</p>
Nov. 29	<p>The Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) publishes its annual <i>Performance Ratings for Adults’ Social Services in England</i>, showing that, while social services departments are judged to be continuing to improve, there remain wide variations across the country, with matters such as equality, dignity, respect and quality of life being matters for concern.</p> <p>The CSCI was set up in 2004, with a similar but more service-specific role to that of the Audit Commission – that is, to provide a clear, independent assessment of the state of social care services in England, to acknowledge good practice, and to use its intervention powers where it finds unacceptable standards. Like the Audit Commission’s Comprehensive Performance Assessments (CPA) in recent years, the CSCI awards ‘star ratings’ – from 3 stars = Excellent, to 0 stars = Inadequate – to all councils providing adult social services (children’s services are separately assessed), to indicate the quality of services provided and the council’s potential to improve. Currently, ‘improvement’ means primarily progress towards a comprehensive single health and social care assessment of the needs of the elderly, and thereby to a more personalised care regime.</p> <p>As with CPA, there are strong systemic incentives to show overall continuous improvement, and the CSCI’s assessment is that councils’ performance has indeed improved for the fifth successive year. Nearly a third of councils were awarded 3 stars, nearly half 2 stars, and once again there are no councils with 0 stars. A new assessment framework has been introduced this year, in which councils’ performance is measured in terms of 7 outcomes. Thus, on the outcome of ‘improving patient health and emotional well-being’, over four-fifths of councils are assessed as good or excellent, and just one council as poor. On ‘maintaining dignity and respect’, three-quarters are good or excellent, but over a third only adequate and 3 poor. However, at the other end of the outcome scale, on ‘freedom from discrimination and harassment’, only 13 councils are judged excellent, and it is such results that have prompted some of the CSCI’s most serious ‘concerns’.</p>

Dec. 10

The DCLG launches the **report of the Councillors Commission, *Representing the Future***, chaired by **Dame Jane Roberts**, a former Leader of London Borough of Camden Council. The Commission was set up in February by Hazel Blears' predecessor, Ruth Kelly, following the 2006 White Paper's proposal for an independent commission to investigate incentives facilitating and the barriers preventing a wider range of people becoming councillors. The report synthesises a considerable body of research, and examines topics such as the public recognition and perceptions of councillors, their representativeness, their qualities and abilities.

The "too many" **barriers to councillor recruitment** include:

- **lack of public awareness** of what councillors do;
- the **negative culture** of local government – its institutions, processes, practices, parties and practitioners;
- **lack of confidence** to stand for election, especially among younger people and members of minority ethnic communities;
- the heavy **time commitment** involved;
- **employment** and employers' frequently hostile attitudes;
- **the rules** – including legal restrictions and the electoral system.

The Commission makes over 60 recommendations, the majority neither particularly controversial nor requiring legislation, but rather action from local authorities and other bodies aimed at attracting a wider range of people to come forward to stand as councillors. Examples of the main, and the few controversial, recommendations are grouped below, under the report's **key principles**:

1. Councils and councillors are central to local democracy

- Local authorities should have a **statutory duty to facilitate democratic engagement** by providing information on the working of local government, promoting the role of councillors, and of civic participation generally.
- The role of **councillor must be compatible with full-time employment and the role of executive member with full- or part-time employment**.
- Local authorities should **assist councillors to be more visible and accessible** in their localities by, for example, placing them at the centre of area-based activities, and utilising councillor-led scrutiny processes.

2. Making the role of councillor better known and appreciated

- **Public service broadcasters** should ensure that they fulfil their remit to **facilitate civic understanding** – in this instance of local government and local democracy.
- All local authorities should take seriously their key role in **publicising and communicating council decisions** and the work of councillors.
- The role of councils and councillors and the value of local democracy should be topics 'mainstreamed' within the **Citizenship curriculum** in schools.
- **Voting age should be reduced from 18 to 16**, with a subsequent review to assess whether **candidacy age** should also be lowered to 16 – both quite highly controversial recommendations.

3. Making it easier for everyone with the potential, regardless of background, to come forward and stand for election

- Introduce a **uniform cycle of 'whole council' 4-yearly elections** across the whole of England (see May 3 above), with all authorities in a given region being elected on the same day – to encourage parties to run high profile campaigns organised around local issues.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt multi-member wards across the whole local government system – to encourage the selection of candidates from under-represented groups, and to encourage teamwork and the sharing of responsibilities between councillors. • Enable local authorities to develop schemes to incentivise voting – e.g. by offering voters the chance to enter a lottery, or a modest council tax discount. • A statutory requirement to limit councillors to 5 consecutive terms of office, and leaders and directly elected mayors to 3 consecutive terms. This is possibly the single most controversial recommendation, a key counter-argument being that a representative’s period in office should be terminated by the electorate, not the law. <p>4. Making it easier for busy people to be councillors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councils should adopt modern business and meeting processes and seek to remove some of the potential disincentives to participation - e.g. lengthy, unduly adversarial, daytime meetings; excessive paperwork. • Councils should sign up to a charter of minimum standards of councillor support – for constituency casework, working from home, childcare, etc. • Employers to have in place a human resources policy providing for time off for public duties, including council work. • A national framework of guiding principles for members’ allowances should be developed, specifying a national minimum basic allowance for each type and size of local authority. • The framework should include ‘parachute payments’ for elected mayors, leaders and executive members who lose office through electoral defeat. <p>Partly perhaps because of its near-clash with the Concordat, the Commission’s launch didn’t receive the media attention that some were hoping for. The DCLG is due to give a formal response on behalf of the Government in March, but unless the Secretary of State gives an active lead to the implementation of a substantial batch of the Commission’s recommendations, it is not easy to see it having any very dramatic impact on council recruitment and membership. Perhaps with this prospect in mind, the Local Government Information Unit has sought to get councils and councillors themselves to seize the initiative. In January 2008 the LGIU circulated to all English councils a 4-page document entitled <i>Supporting Councillors: A Manifesto for Councils</i>. The councils are being asked to sign up to the manifesto and to set about implementing as many as possible of its 12 ‘Action Points’, which are drawn directly in most cases from the Councillors Commission and the LGIU/All-Party Parliamentary Local Government Group Report (see June 25).</p>
Dec. 12	<p>DCLG Secretary, Hazel Blears, and LGA Chairman, Sir Simon Milton sign the Central-Local Concordat on behalf of, respectively, the Government and the LGA.</p> <p>[It should probably be emphasised that this Concordat is entirely separate and different from the cross-sector Protocol – also referred to as a Concordat – on adult social care, published only two days earlier. That Protocol, entitled <i>Putting People First: A shared vision and commitment to the transformation of Adult Social Care</i>, was signed by social care and health providers across all sectors – the NHS, central and local government, professional bodies and regulators – and commits signatories to a radical transformation of adult care services over the next three years. It spells out in some detail the elements of the ‘shared vision’ – a personalised adult social care system – and, even more importantly, details of the funding arrangements that will support it. It thus contrasts markedly, in tone and specificity, with the Central-Local Concordat.]</p>

This Concordat, a commitment in the Government's July Green Paper on constitutional reform, sets out a framework of principles for how central and local government should work together. It can thus be seen as a revised and a rather more explicit version of *A Framework for Partnership* (1997) that established the Central-Local Partnership meetings that take place approximately three times a year between ministers and local government representatives.

The **main elements** of the Concordat are as follows (all emphases added):

- the acknowledgement of a **joint responsibility, and electoral mandate**, to meet public expectations.
- an emphasis on central and local government constituting a **partnership**, with shared objectives in both improving services and strengthening democracy, and – a potentially significant commitment here to what amounts to a **doctrine of subsidiarity** - with “a presumption that **powers are best exercised at the lowest effective and practical level**” (Clause 4).
- an assertion of **central government's “over-riding interest in matters such as the national economic interest, public service improvement and standards of delivery, and taxation”** (Clause 5).
- a matching assertion of **local government's responsibilities for service performance**, and ... “**to do all they can to secure the social, economic and environmental well-being of their areas**” (Clause 6).
- **definitions of reciprocal rights and responsibilities** – perhaps the real core of the document and the part whose precise language will probably be subjected to the most critical examination:
 - **Central government's right** is to set national policies, minimum service standards and support local areas, and, **as a last resort, to intervene to avoid significant underperformance** (Clause 8).
 - **Central government's responsibility** is to consult and collaborate with councils in exercising these rights, and “**to progressively remove obstacles which prevent councils from pursuing their role**, including reducing the burden of appraisal and approval regimes, the ring-fencing of funds for specific purposes, and the volume of guidance it issues” (Clause 9).
 - **Councils' right** is to address the priorities of their communities as expressed through local elections, to lead the delivery of public services in their area, and **to shape its future without unnecessary direction or control** (Clause 10).
 - **Councils' responsibility** is to provide accountable, visible and responsible community leadership, and to work in partnership with the local statutory, business and third sectors to drive continuing improvement (Clause 11).
 - **Both partners' responsibility** is use taxpayers' money well and to devolve power, engaging and empowering communities and individual citizens in shaping and delivering services (Clause 12).
- an acceptance that, if central and local government are to work together to deliver the new style Local Area Agreements, the new Performance Framework, and other central government policies, it “will require **major changes in behaviour and practice from central government departments, their agencies, government offices, councils and local partners**” (Clause 14).
- recognition of a shared commitment to ensure that public services, including new obligations on councils, “are properly funded, and that **local taxation is guided by principles of transparency and accountability**. We will work together ... **towards giving councils greater flexibility in their funding, to facilitate the wide degree of autonomy referred to in the European Charter of Local Self-Government**” (Clause 14).

Not surprisingly, the two signatories of the Concordat were effusive in assessing its importance. The LGA sees it as “a significant and ground-breaking step ... in freeing councils from control from the centre and allows them to represent better than ever before the people they serve.” The Government was to be congratulated “for the courage and commitment shown in making such public commitments to the further development of a new way forward between central and local government.” Some of the language is indeed ground-breaking, particularly if taken at face value – the commitments to subsidiarity and greater flexibility in council funding; the acceptance of an equivalence between local electoral mandates and the demands of national government; the recognition of the inadequacy of the council tax system because of its lack of transparency and accountability; the admitted unacceptability of much of central government’s way of working and of the need for change.

On the other hand, there is an **imprecision about some of the key terminology** that could be said to match its **lack of any legal or statutory basis** and the **absence even of any kind of independent monitoring or enforcement mechanism**, such as a parliamentary committee. Who, for instance (apart from the partners to the Concordat), decides what “the lowest effective and practical level” of service delivery is? Or when central government’s interest becomes “over-riding”? Or when the “last resort” is reached, prior to central government intervention? Or how fast “progressively” is, when it comes to the removal of obstacles? Or how much, if any, increase in funding flexibility needs to result from the process of merely working “towards” it? As a cynic, writing to the *Municipal Journal* put it: “A more honest concordat would start with a preamble, saying: ‘We think local government is very nice to work with, but we have no intention of handing over the sweetshop to the kids, thank you very much.’” (*MJ*, 10 January, 2008, p.10).

Favourable comment has been made about the several references, both explicit and implicit, to the **European Charter for Local Self-Government**, the signing of which (after 12 years of Conservative Governments refusing to do so) was one of the very first acts of the New Labour Government in 1997. Signing, and even ratification (1998), however, are not the same as implementation, and the Government has come under increasing criticism for its failure to deliver the degree of devolution to which it supposedly committed itself. It would be odd to draw attention to this particular implementation gap, if Ministers had no intention of addressing it.

The last word should perhaps go to Hazel Blears, who described the Concordat as the first step towards enshrining the role of councils in a constitutional setting – in other words, in something like Japan’s Local Autonomy Law. Such a setting would, its advocates claim, do things like:

- **establishing a legal framework** giving local government a clear basis and a general competence for the benefit of its citizens and other inhabitants;
- **clarifying the distinction between powers** delegated to local government by national government, as compared to local government's own powers;
- **extend significantly local government's financial capacities** by increasing substantially its proportion of income from local taxation and reducing the proportion from central government grants, and by abolishing practices like expenditure and tax ‘capping’.

If the Concordat is a first step towards actions like these, it is at most a very small step indeed.

Dec. 13	<p>The Treaty of Lisbon is formally signed by the heads of the 27 member states of the European Union (EU). The Treaty amends the existing EU treaties, outlining a set of reformed institutions and working methods to enable the now greatly enlarged Union to operate more democratically, efficiently and effectively. It was initially known as the Reform Treaty: a revision – just how extensive is a matter of fierce disagreement – of the Constitutional Treaty that, following its signing in 2004, was rejected by referendum voters in France and the Netherlands. This Treaty too has to be ratified by all member countries, which all are supposed to do during 2008, mainly through parliamentary processes. The UK Labour Government, despite having promised in its 2005 Election manifesto to put the Constitutional Treaty “to the British people in a referendum”, has decreed that the Lisbon Treaty is a fundamentally different document – an amending treaty, rather than a new constitution – requiring only parliamentary consideration and approval.</p> <p>Even if it hadn’t virtually coincided with the Central-Local Concordat, it is unlikely the Treaty would have received very more attention than it did from the local government world, and indeed its 7 main amending Articles contain no direct mention at all of local government. But annexed to the Treaty are also numerous Protocols, the eighth of which, concerning Services of General Interest (SGIs), does contain the first reference of its kind to local authorities in any EU treaty. To coincide with the Treaty’s signing, the LGA have addressed the topic in one of its ‘Rough Guides to European Affairs’: <i>Local Public Services in the Single Market</i>. In its Protocol the EU re-emphasises that internal market principles apply to increasing numbers of local authority activities, when they are ‘economic’ in nature, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • purchasing/procurement; • providing financial support to service providers; • undertaking joint ventures with the private sector; • sharing services and joint-purchasing with other public sector bodies. <p>Examples of economic activities would be waste collection, road building, and the provision of care services. Education and policing, however, would be classed as non-economic and not subject therefore to internal market rules. While the Protocol refers to public authorities being allowed “wide discretion” in providing and commissioning services, this economic/non-economic distinction can be difficult to apply on an EU-wide basis. It is, moreover, a source of frustration for some not-for-profit and social enterprise organisations, who feel they should be given special recognition when undertaking ‘economic’ activities because of the social goals they pursue. To help deal with such issues, the EU Commission will set up an ‘interactive assistance’ website.</p>
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<p>Jan. 2008 Jan 11</p>	<p>The Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) publishes a commissioned essay, <i>Getting Better All the Time? An independent assessment of local government improvement and its prospects</i> by Clive Grace and Steve Martin, both currently at Cardiff University's Business School. The essay is intended as an authoritative review of what has been learnt over the past decade and a look forward to how the 'improvement journey' might develop (www.idea.gov.uk/idk/aio/7834846).</p> <p>The authors' retrospective analysis is quite strongly positive – more so than others might have been. They accept that, as CPA rankings appear to show, there have been major improvements in the performance of English local authorities in terms of corporate capacity, the quality and responsiveness of key services, partnership working, delivering significant efficiency gains, and improved public satisfaction. These improvements have resulted from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • central government's determination to drive change and improvement, combined with significant increases in funding for public services; • 'support advocacy and assessment' provided by national bodies like the LGA, the Audit Commission, and of course the IDeA; • a growing culture of 'self-improvement' within individual local authorities. <p>The problem – for the Government as well as for the authors' analysis – is that the public, whether judged by their responses to opinion polls or their electoral turnout, give no real sign of having noticed. Nor is this public recognition gap likely to decline in the near future, as expectations rise and resources become tighter.</p> <p>At this point, Grace and Martin become more critical. The 'top-down' models of improvement that have driven improvement policy in the past have outlived their usefulness. Central Government must learn to let go and local government must move beyond a 'compliance mentality'. Yet the new Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) regime is closely modelled on the CPA – simply extending areas about corporate capacity and leadership to a wider network of partners and to an area-wide basis (see Nov. 19 above)- with far too little recognition of the changed local environment. The emphasis will continue to be on incremental improvement, rather than on innovation 'genuinely driven by citizen and user needs and by local political and policy choice'. For there to be this change of emphasis, central government simply has to learn to let go, and 'local public service providers need to be seen as independent actors capable of making a bigger contribution to the new improvement equation rather than as the front end of a centrally driven delivery chain' (p.13).</p>
<p>Jan 17</p>	<p>The Department of Health (DH) issues a circular, <i>Transforming Social Care</i>, detailing further the implementation of the Government's policy of 'personalising' adult social care and eventually other social and public services, as set out in the DH's 2005 Green Paper, <i>Independence, Well-being and Choice</i>, and 2006 White Paper, <i>Our Health, Our Care, Our Say: A New Direction for Community Services</i>.</p> <p>Personalisation involves 'every person across the spectrum of need having choice and control over the shape of his or her support, in the most appropriate setting', through, if necessary, assistance provided by professionals or independent advocates. It is prompted by several trends and developments obviously not unique to the UK:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increasing numbers of both older and extremely elderly people; • people with learning disabilities and severely disabled children living longer; • changes in the need for and availability of voluntary carers; • increased expectations of people wishing to live independently at home with greater control over their own lives;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a policy shift towards well-being and prevention in preference to intervention at the point of crisis. <p>The DH circular identifies several necessary changes that councils will be expected to acknowledge and work towards implementing by 2011:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a system of common assessment, with a strong emphasis on self-assessment, of individual care needs – applicable across service boundaries and all potential service providers; • a change in the role of social workers from assessment and gate-keeping to advocacy and brokerage; • a change to ‘person-centred planning’, in which service users can direct the flexible use of resources; • a personal budget for all those eligible for social care in all settings; • a different relationship between central and local government, enabling personalisation at a local level. <p>As indicated by the reference to the 2005 Green Paper, personalisation has been an increasing feature of both health and social care for a few years now, with individual budgets in particular being popular with service users. The significance of the new circular, however, is its confirmation of the Government’s intention greatly to extend the number of services available under this model and the numbers of recipients – without, in the opinion of many in local government, fully recognising either the resource or other implications. There is reference to the new ring-fenced Social Care Reform Grant, but no sign of any large-scale injection of funding comparable to that received by the NHS.</p> <p>There are other reservations too about personalisation, particularly among those instinctively critical of New Labour’s ideology of individualisation and the transfer of risk from the state to the individual. It is felt to constitute too ready an acceptance of the marketisation of social work, to involve a stigmatising view of welfare dependency, and to promote, rather than challenge, the deprofessionalisation of social work (e.g. I. Ferguson, <i>British Journal of Social Work</i>, Vol. 37, 2007).</p>
Jan 18	<p>The Audit Commission (AC) publishes a research-based report, <i>Positively Charged: Maximising the benefits of local public service charges</i>, aimed at assessing the contribution made by charging to the funding and strategic effectiveness of local government, and at helping councils to relate their charging policies more directly to their strategic objectives.</p> <p>The AC’s findings showed that many councils are not clear how what tend to be known as ‘fees and charges’ contribute to their overall spending. In such cases it is inevitable that they do not demonstrate clearly to their taxpayers the rationale for charging for certain services or the necessity on occasions to increase those charges. It may be that that a similar lack of transparency pertains in Japanese local government. For, as can be seen in the following typical presentations of the main income/revenue sources for, respectively, Japanese and English local authorities, it can be difficult to identify from Japanese public accounts even the overall proportion of income that might be compared to ‘charges for services’ in the English chart.</p> <p>As shown in the second chart, English councils nowadays raise 12% of their income or approximately £16.2 billion (3,455 billion JPY) in service charges, about one third of which comprises council house rents. This is equivalent to £315 (67,150 JPY) for every person in England. The AC report shows that over a quarter of councils – mostly shire districts – generate more income through charging than they do through council tax.</p>

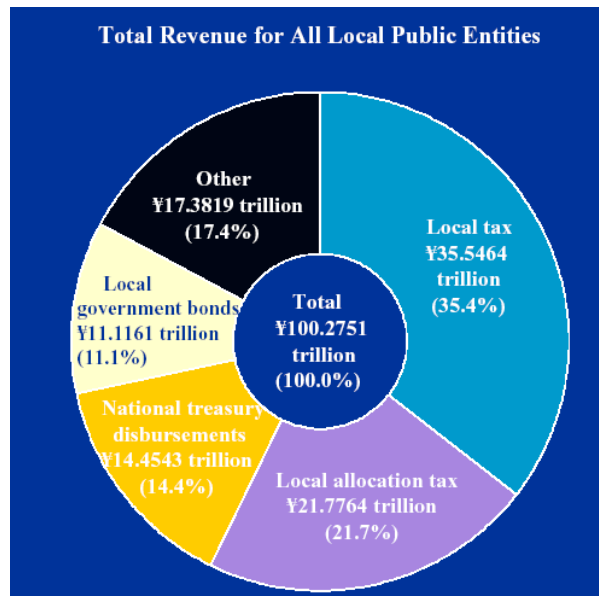
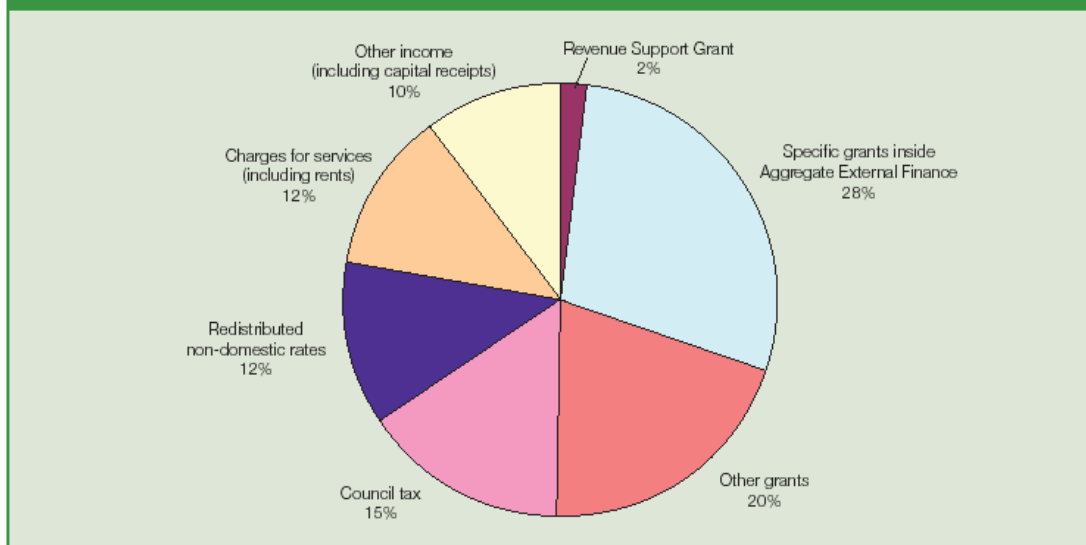


Chart 2.1b: Local authority income by source 2006-07

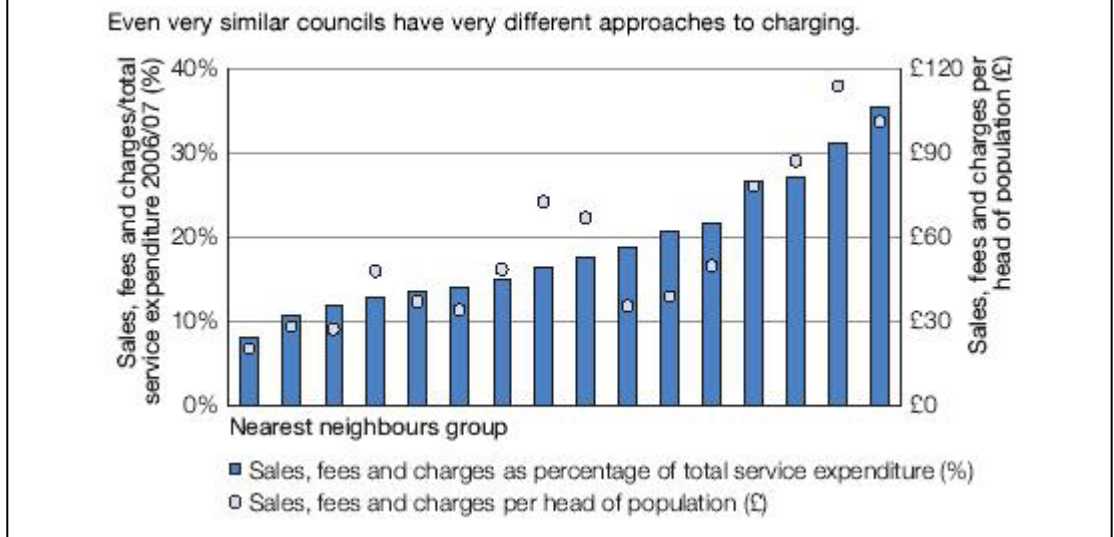


The biggest sources of charge income, apart from rents, are education services, such as school meals and transport; social services, such as homecare; and transport services such as parking.

Councils can obviously use charges for several quite different purposes: to encourage or discourage the use of services, to ration services, or to pursue particular social or political objectives – encouraging recycling, promoting participation in sports, reducing traffic congestion. Even so, as shown in the graph below, the AC found very wide differences in charging practices, even among councils of the same type. District councils, for example, generated income ranging from 2% to 67% of their total service spending, and even in the same area of the country, the range was still considerable:

Evidently, councils in similar circumstances make different decisions about which services to provide and whether, and at what level, to subsidise and charge for those services. This is quite proper and to be expected in a local democratic system, but it can also cause concern among neighbouring service users who find themselves paying

Figure 5 Charging income for a group of district council nearest neighbours (2006/07)



different sums for essentially similar services. This concern can be minimised, the Audit Commission argues, by properly explaining the reasons for the variations and involving local people in the decision-making process.

UK councils have powers to charge for a wide range of services. In the past, these powers frequently stemmed from legislation relating to specific service areas – e.g. arts and entertainment activities, sports facilities, pest control. **Section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000**, however, gave local authorities a so-called ‘well-being power’ – enabling them to do anything they consider is likely to benefit the economic, social or environmental well-being of their areas – which could include introducing and charging for discretionary services. This was reinforced by a general charging power in **Section 93 of the Local Government Act 2003**, enabling authorities to charge as they choose for discretionary services, provided that no other legislation prohibits their doing so – e.g. collection of household refuse, loans of printed material from libraries – and that they do not make a profit.

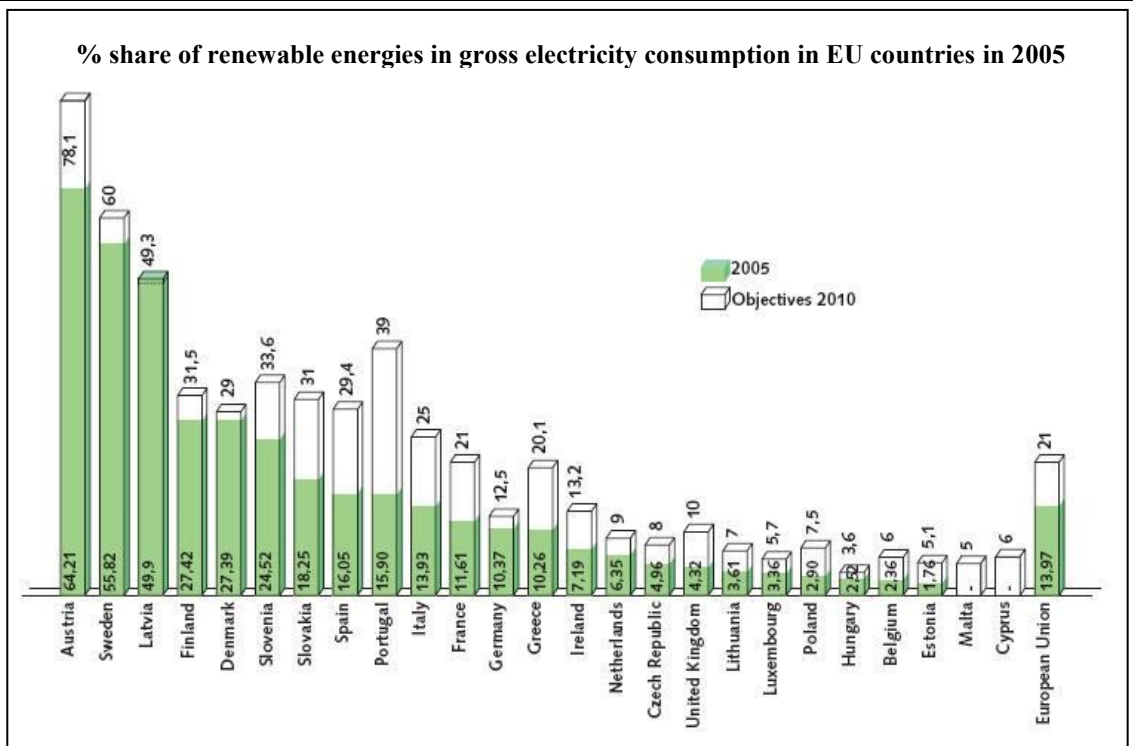
The AC found little evidence of councils developing new discretionary services, but some 60% of councils reported having introduced new charges for services they had previously provided at no charge – e.g. pre-application planning advice. Inevitably, such charges, when imposed for the first time, are unpopular, but there is also evidence that some of councils’ apprehension about local hostility to charges may be unfounded, especially in the case of services that people choose to use, as opposed to those they feel they need. Important recommendations of the report are that there should be much more open discussion about charging policies – within councils and between councils and their service users – and that generally authorities should have greater discretion to set and vary charges if they are properly to fulfil the ‘place-shaping’ responsibilities that the Government sees as one of their key roles.

Jan 22

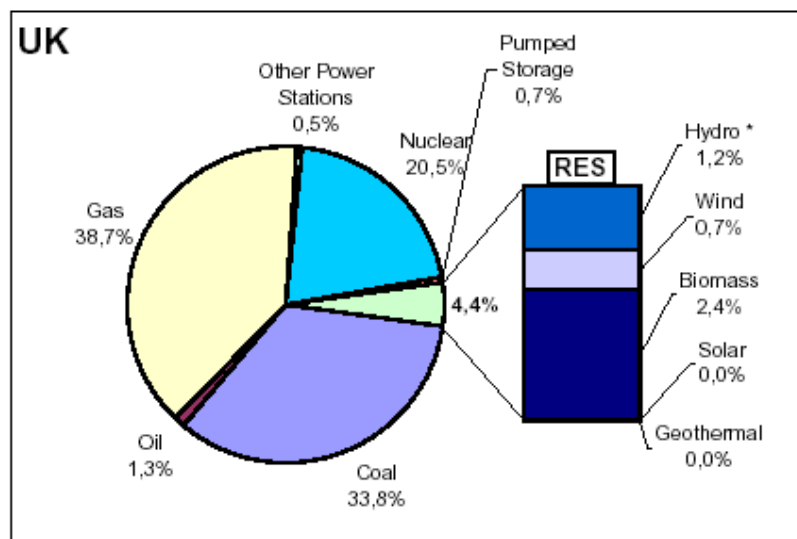
The **DCLG** publishes *How to Develop a Charter – a Guide for Local Authorities*.

One of the many commitments of the Government’s October 2006 White Paper, *Strong and Prosperous Communities*, was to “encourage councils to develop **neighbourhood charters** setting out ... the service standards and priorities for action which local people expect from the local authority, as well as any obligations the community has taken on

	<p>itself” (pp. 7, 41). As even the White Paper acknowledged – though without referring to the Conservative Major Government of the 1990s that did most to popularise them – such charters are certainly not new, but they represent an idea that fits well with the present government’s ‘empowerment’ agenda. As the <i>Guide</i> notes, they can encourage councils to get more people involved in local decision making, help to promote the local role of councillors, and generally contribute to the building of community capacity.</p> <p>The <i>Guide</i> seems understandably concerned to emphasise that charters can take a wider variety of forms than the typical listing of ‘must-have’ services, expectations of service opening times, etc. that characterised many of the earlier generation of local charters. For a start, they can involve pledges or targets from other local providers – the NHS, fire and police services – as well as from the council. Other forms might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community pacts – charters setting agreements for individual residents to take on jobs traditionally carried out by the local council – e.g. mowing grass verges – in exchange for extra local authority services elsewhere, including more regular refuse collection; • Monitoring agreements - arrangements where local resident volunteers, or ‘neighbourhood champions’, monitor the performance of services; • Resident takeovers – charters allowing co-ops of local people – e.g. community groups, residents’ associations, town or parish councils – to take over the running and management of certain services. <p>In launching the <i>Guide</i> and announcing the 12 areas in which these neighbourhood charters are to be piloted, Secretary of State Hazel Blears also called for a public debate on the topic that for many is the most appealing part of the whole charter exercise – forms of redress for the public where services fail to meet promised standards. Redress might range from an investigation into why the contracted service standards were not delivered, a commitment from the responsible organisation to rectify the problem, to – most problematically for a public sector body – financial compensation for more serious or persistent failure.</p>
Jan 23	<p>The European Commission publishes a Directive, outlining a package of proposals to deliver the EU’s headline target that renewable energy should constitute a 20% share of the energy consumed in the EU by 2020, compared to the current level of 8.5%.</p> <p>The EU actually sets two renewable energy targets, divided among member states according to their existing levels of renewable energy and the potential for growth. The UK’s target contribution towards the 20% renewable share of ‘final’ or total energy consumption is 15%, compared to its current 1.3% share – the third lowest in the EU. The second target – increasingly controversial because of the concern about the negative impact biofuels can have on the physical environment – is of a binding minimum of 10% for biofuels in transport.</p> <p>To meet these targets the UK government will publish a UK Renewable Energy Strategy in spring 2009, but an indication of the scale of change required can be seen in the following charts showing EU countries’ recent shares of renewable energies in <i>electricity</i> consumption. These figures are particularly relevant for the UK, for it is likely that, with the heat and transport sectors unlikely to be able to meet their share of the overall target, a disproportionate burden will fall on electricity generation, with between 30% and 40% having to be generated from renewable sources.</p>



Gross Electricity Generation by fuel (2005)



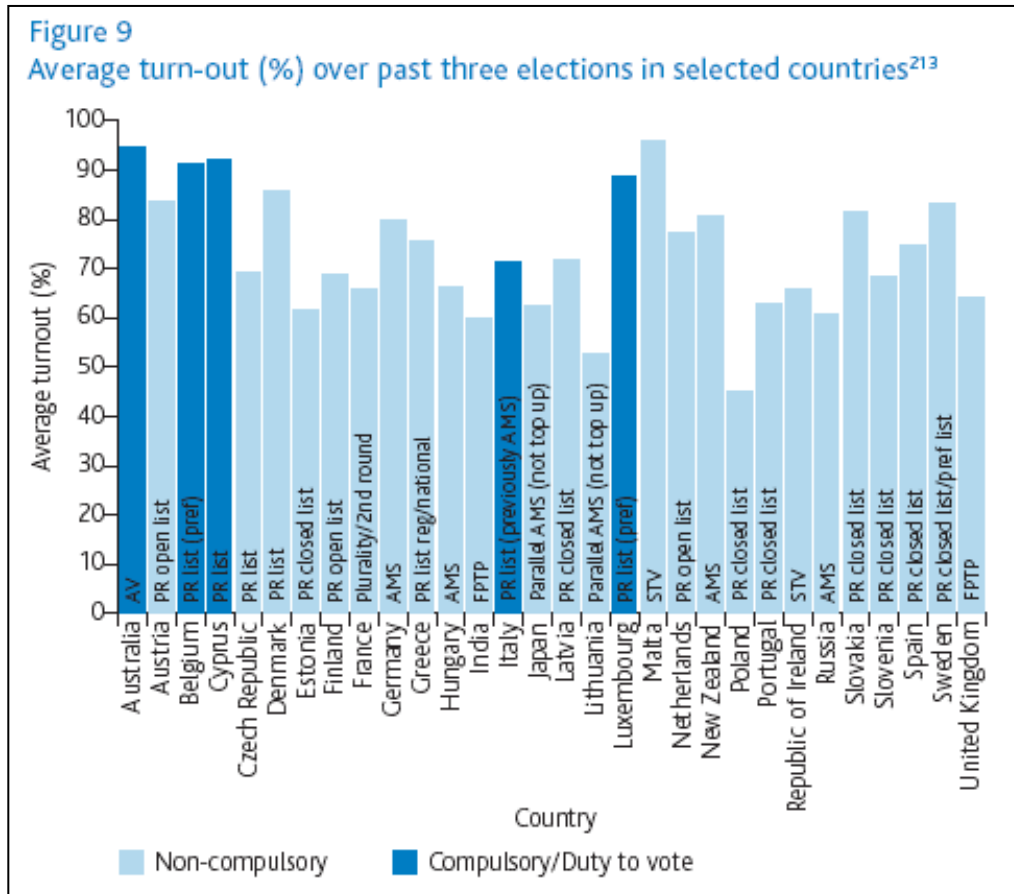
For local authorities the EU directive has perhaps two features of particular interest. First, it is an even more powerful example than recycling (see July 1 above) of a policy impinging significantly on local authorities that is largely driven not by our own central government but by ‘Brussels’. Secondly, it has potentially wide-ranging implications for local government’s planning role – setting targets, for example, for developers on renewable energy, dealing with proposals for, and opposition to, wind power developments.

Jan 24

The DLGS publishes a policy document, *The Community Infrastructure Levy*, outlining one of the key provisions in the Planning Bill currently going through Parliament. The CIL seeks to establish a better and more productive way for local authorities to secure contributions from developers to fund infrastructure developments in their areas.

	<p>The existing way in which councils get developers to mitigate the impacts of new development is by negotiating the inclusion of specified planning obligations in the granting of planning consent. These obligations are known as Section 106 agreements after s.106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, which authorises them. Planning obligations are sought for a wide range of purposes, including open space provision, educational and community facilities, transport provision, etc., but recently they have focused predominantly on the provision of affordable housing units. They are, however, very far from universal, with councils being less inclined to negotiate in the case of relatively smaller developments; they are also criticised for delaying the planning process and reducing its transparency and accountability.</p> <p>The CIL is intended, therefore, not to replace this existing system, but to work alongside it and unlock additional infrastructure funding. Local authorities will be empowered, not required, to determine and levy a standard charge for new development – e.g. so much per dwelling or per square metre of development. In doing so, they will need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to identify – in consultation with developers, infrastructure providers and the public – what infrastructure is needed and how much it will cost; • to calculate what contribution each development should make to that cost. <p>While details have still to be worked out, the CIL is likely to be welcomed generally by local government for the same kinds of reasons as the Business Rate Supplement (see Oct 9 above). Both potentially increase the investment resources available to councils, and both are tied to priorities identified at local level by local government.</p>
Jan 24	<p>The Ministry of Justice publishes its much delayed <i>Review of Voting Systems: the experience of new voting systems in the United Kingdom since 1997</i>.</p> <p>The New Labour Government came into office in 1997 with a manifesto commitment to hold a national referendum on whether the House of Commons should be elected by a more proportional electoral system than the highly disproportional plurality (or ‘First-past-the-post’) system used at that time in all national and local Great Britain elections. Tony Blair reneged on this commitment and refused to call such a referendum. In its place Labour’s 2001 and 2005 manifestos contained pledges to reconsider electoral reform for the Commons in the light of the experience of the more proportional systems introduced for the devolved parliaments and assemblies in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and Greater London, for the European Parliament, and most recently for Scottish local elections (see May 3 above). This review contains, as it were, the raw material for this reconsideration, although there is no serious prospect of anything happening during the remainder of this Parliament.</p> <p>The Review comes to no clear conclusions and makes no recommendations. It is chiefly an unexceptional and reasonably balanced examination of how the new electoral systems have affected the proportional allocations of seats – producing, for example, the sequence of coalitions in the Scottish Parliament, the minority administrations and present coalition in the Assembly for Wales, the election of Green and UK Independence Party candidates to the Greater London Assembly. It looks also at their impact on voters' choice, turnout rates, political campaigning, social representation and administration.</p> <p>It thus has only indirect relevance to local government, and is only included in this report for two reasons. First, it is a useful reference point for the results of all sub- and supra-national elections up to the end of 2007 held under these new systems: www.justice.gov.uk/docs/voting-systems-review-full.pdf. Secondly, bearing in mind that almost all current Governmental concern with the ‘health’ of our electoral system is prompted by our relatively low – and, in General Elections, seriously declining – turnout</p>

rates, the following table drawn from the international chapter of the Review makes quite interesting reading. For, while its last three General Election turnouts (71.5% in 1997, 59.4% in 2001, 61.3% in 2005) put the UK at 23rd out of the 30 selected countries, one of the very few established democracies below it happens to be Japan.



Feb. 7

The **Home Office** publishes the *Final Report of The Review of Policing* undertaken by **Sir Ronnie Flanagan**, Chief Inspector of Constabulary for the UK (excluding Scotland) – the *Interim Report* having been published in September 2007. Much of the reports’ content is concerned with details of policing operations, but there are at least three themes of major relevance to local government:

- the mainstreaming of Neighbourhood Policing;
- the emphasis placed on partnership working; and on
- improving local involvement and accountability.

Neighbourhood Policing (NP) represents the biggest reform in British policing in recent years and a considerable departure from previous organisation and practice based on ‘response policing’. Its aims are to reduce both crime itself and the (often statistically unfounded) fear of crime, by eliminating ‘unnecessary bureaucracy’ and making the police more accessible, visible, pro-active, and accountable. It sounds as if it might owe something to Japan’s famous ‘koban’ system, but, as is the British way, there was no reference to any overseas institutions or experience in the 2004 White Paper, *Building Communities, Beating Crime*, in which the concept was launched.

Structurally, NP has involved the 43 police forces in England and Wales sub-dividing their operational command units (OCUs) into neighbourhoods of, typically, a few thousand residents. For example, in my own area, the West Midlands Police, the second largest in the country with a largely urban population of 2.6 million, has 21 OCUs and 297 neighbourhoods, giving an average population of 8,750. Each neighbourhood has its own **policing team** comprising, in total:

- 8,500 uniformed police officers;
- 4,100 police staff;
- 720 (voluntary) special constables and other volunteers, performing various roles from administrative support to front-desk duties;
- 750 Police **Community Support Officers (CSOs)** and wardens. The CSOs represent the most visible manifestation of NP, and they work alongside uniformed police officers in a ‘non-confrontational’ role, patrolling the streets, dealing with problems of nuisance behaviour and disorder.

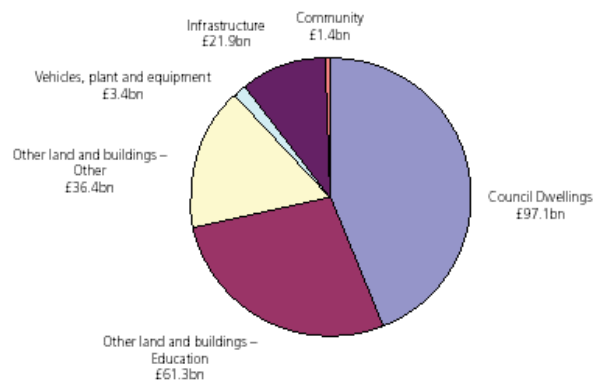
Even where, as in the West Midlands, these new ways of working are becoming established, the Flanagan Reports acknowledge that NP cannot yet be “seen as *the* mechanism through which policing is delivered” (*Interim Report*, p.21). Certainly, the Police Federation – ‘the voice of the operational police officer’ – questions whether the pro-active work of neighbourhood teams within the community really does reduce the pressure on 24/7 response teams by heading-off potential incidents, and is concerned that the resourcing of the former can constitute a threat to the latter.

If NP is to be ‘**mainstreamed**’, what amounts to a cultural change will be required within the police service. Performance measures need to incorporate the breadth of activity and outcomes delivered by NP. The role, recruitment and future status of CSOs need to be clarified. But, because of its emphasis on partnership working, perhaps most important of all for the effective mainstreaming of NP is that it be entrenched within – rather than developed alongside, as has tended to be the case – the much broader and multi-agency approach known as ‘**Neighbourhood Management**’, involving the joining up and ‘seamless delivery’ of local services within neighbourhoods.” (*Interim Report*, p.22).

At national level, Flanagan argues, this will require the Home Office and the DCLG to align their agendas and work in closer co-ordination – which, in the now universalised

	<p>Australian phrase, amounts to a ‘very big ask’. Locally, Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs - see July 19 above) will be looked to for leadership and priority setting on community safety issues, while the new Comprehensive Area Assessments (CAAs - see November 19 above) will focus on delivery of successful partnership outcomes.</p> <p>On accountability, Flanagan starts from an acceptance of research findings showing that high proportions of the public feel they have no influence over and no great confidence in the police, and that they want greater responsiveness and answerability. But, rather than recommend any particular structure for increasing accountability, Chapter 7 of the final report sets out a range of optional models and considers their benefits and drawbacks. The most feasible of these models involve:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introducing direct election into elements of policing – e.g. of police ‘commissioners’/‘sheriffs’ (see November 22 above), or whole police authorities. This could enhance transparency and performance assessment, but would have the highly controversial effect (in the British context) of politicising policing and potentially hampering co-operation with local authorities. 2. Strengthening local authorities – either through drawing back police authority functions into top-tier local authorities, or by making local authorities fully responsible for community safety and thereby able to commission services from the police force in a ‘sole provider’ relationship. There are immediate structural difficulties – of many current police authorities not coinciding with local authority areas, the unique position of London and the Metropolitan Police. But it would assist the co-ordination of Neighbourhood Policing and Neighbourhood Management and the presentation of policing priorities as part of an integrated strategy, and give a boost to councillors’ community leadership role. 3. Strengthening police authorities – e.g. by increasing the dedicated resources available to them or increasing their responsibilities. This would seem the option least favoured even by Flanagan himself, for, while it might have the potential to improve operational effectiveness, it seems hardly likely to increase public accountability, the deficiencies in which these restructuring options were intended to address.
Feb 8	<p>The DCLG publishes an advisory report for local authorities, <i>Building on Strong Foundations: A Framework for Local Authority Asset Management</i>.</p> <p>Asset management – seeking to align an organisation’s asset base of land, buildings, plant and equipment with its corporate goals and objectives – is a comparatively new, or at least newly important, activity for many UK local authorities, some of whom might have had difficulty until quite recently even quantifying the total value of the assets they owned. Today, though, it is a key element in any local authority’s drive to improve service delivery, meet carbon emissions and environmental sustainability targets, empower local communities (see May 15 above), and, of course, generate efficiency gains.</p> <p>The chief product of the report is a diagrammatic Local Authority Asset Management Framework (p.32) that brings together the principal policies, influences and considerations that are likely to be relevant to any size or type of local authority. But there is also an interesting by-product in the form of a pie chart presentation of the main types of local authority assets, which provides a useful additional measure of the scale of our local government sector:</p>

Value of local authority fixed operational assets 31 March 2007



Source: Local Authority Capital Expenditure and Receipts, England, 2006-07 Final Outturn

In 2007 the 389 English local authorities owned over £220 billion (45 trillion JPY) of fixed operational assets – a sum that can be compared, for example, to a total annual revenue expenditure of £130 billion and annual capital expenditure of £16 billion. The main categories of assets are:

- **Council housing** – nowadays less than 10% of the country’s housing stock, compared to over 80% that is owner occupied;
- **Lands and buildings** used to deliver a direct service to the public – e.g. schools, elderly persons’ homes, public parks;
- **Assets that support service delivery** – e.g. the town hall, other administrative offices, vehicle depots;
- **Non-operational property** – e.g. surplus property awaiting sale, or commercial and industrial property;
- **Transport assets** – e.g. highways, ports, municipal airports, bus stations, car parks.

<p>March 12</p>	<p>The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Alistair Darling, presents his first Budget – the Government’s annual financial statement, reviewing tax levels and announcing spending plans – in a speech to the House of Commons. Traditionally, the Budget is one of the high points of the political and parliamentary year, and, thanks to the changes in tax and duties that cannot be announced in advance, it still attracts considerable public and media interest – this year’s headlines being the increases in the cost of cigarettes (11p/23 JPY per packet), beer, wine and other alcohol, the postponement of the increase in fuel duty, and the reform of vehicle excise duty in favour of low-polluting cars.</p> <p>As far as local government is concerned, however, the Budget has become much less directly significant in recent years, following the introduction of the Pre-Budget Report and spending reviews (see October 9 above) and the new 3-year local government finance (Revenue Support Grant) settlement in December. Thus, this year’s Budget confirmed both the overall and local government spending figures set out in the CSR07.</p>
<p>March 13</p>	<p>The Environment Minister in the Northern Ireland Executive, Arlene Foster, announces the key decisions on the future shape of local government in Northern Ireland, following the province-wide Review of Public Administration. The current 26 local government districts will be ‘rationalised’ to create 11 new local government districts, which will have transferred to them a range of new responsibilities – including aspects of planning, rural development, roads, urban regeneration and community development, housing, tourism – that will enable local government to fulfil its role as leader and shaper of communities.</p>
<p>March 19</p>	<p>The Secretary of State for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform, John Hutton, releases details of a letter he has written to Post Office Ltd. instructing them to enter into negotiations with councils who wish to try and preserve some of the 2,500 local post offices that have been earmarked for closure. Many councils have reported a reluctance on the part of Post Office Ltd to get involved in such talks, and the LGA has been pressing Ministers for precisely this kind of directive (see October 2 above).</p>
<p>March 27</p>	<p>Local Government Minister, John Healey, delivers the Government’s annual reminder of just who controls local government finance in England and Wales by announcing 8 authorities that have been designated for council tax ‘capping’.</p> <p>The way in which the system works is that the Minister announces at the time of the grant settlement the maximum percentage increases that authorities will be permitted in their budgets and council taxes: for 2008-09 both figures were set at 5% above those for 2007-08. There being only the one tax to which local authorities have access, these ‘caps’ effectively determine the parameters of every single local authority’s budget.</p> <p>When New Labour came into government, it was widely expected that capping – introduced by the Thatcher Government in the 1980s – would be abandoned, not least because it is incompatible with the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, signed by that New Labour Government as one of its very first actions in 1997. Instead, Ministers revived its use in 2004 and have deployed it against a limited number of authorities each year – the present ‘culprits’ being Lincolnshire, Cheshire, Leicestershire, Warwickshire, Surrey, Bedfordshire and Norfolk Police Authorities, and Portsmouth City Council, who have been given 21 days in which to make their case to the Government before further action is taken.</p>

May 1

Local elections in England and Wales; also elections for the Mayor of London and the London Assembly.

As noted above (see May 3, 2007), the different types of local authorities in the UK have different electoral cycles. This year **8,416 council seats were contested in 137 English and 22 Welsh councils:**

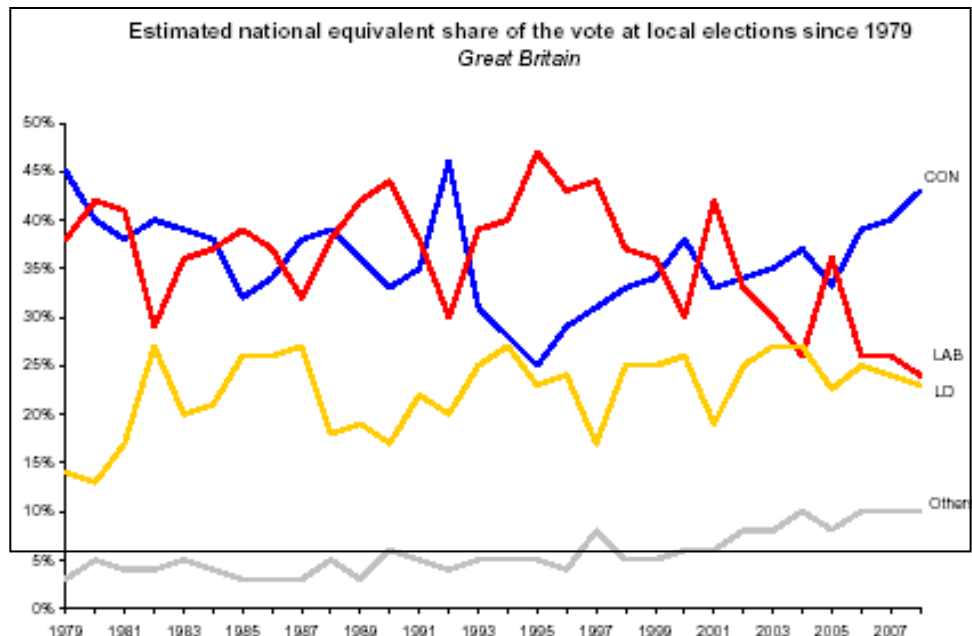
- all 36 English metropolitan boroughs (1/3 of seats only)
- 78 English shire/non-metropolitan districts:
 - 67 shire districts (1/3 seats)
 - 7 shire districts (1/2 seats)
 - 4 shire districts (all seats)
- 19 English unitary councils (1/3 seats)
- 4 'new' English unitary councils, to come into full operation in April 2009 (all seats)
- all 22 Welsh unitary councils (all seats).

Headline results:

- **Average overall turnout** for all types of authority was **36%**, which is very slightly down on the 2007 figure, due possibly to the smaller proportion of 'whole council' elections, which generally produce slightly higher turnouts.
- **25 English and 7 Welsh councils changed political control** in some form or other, including going into or out of 'no overall control' (NOC) by a single political party.
- As in 2007, **Conservatives were the biggest winners, making net gains of 12 councils and over 250 seats.** Their 14 additional councils, gained mainly from NOC, included Southampton, Solihull, North Tyneside, and Bury, plus Vale of Glamorgan in Wales. They lost Coventry and Colchester to NOC.
- **Labour's net losses amounted to 9 councils and 334 seats.** The West Midlands council of Nuneaton & Bedworth was lost direct to the Conservatives for the first time, and the other losses – Hartlepool, Reading and Wolverhampton in England, plus 6 Welsh councils – were to NOC.
- **The Liberal Democrats made net gains of 1 council and 33 councillors.** Councils gained included Burnley, Hull and Sheffield, but Liverpool was lost to NOC.
- Among the smaller parties, the **Green Party** won 47 seats, a net gain of 5, and the **British National Party** won 37, a net gain of 10.
- The major parties' **estimated national equivalent shares of the national vote** (i.e. if all GB voters had had the opportunity to vote) were:
 - Conservatives: 43%** - 3% higher than in 2007, and higher than in any recent year except the party's two General Election-winning years of 1992 and 1979;
 - Labour: 24%** - 2% lower than in 2007, which was itself the party's lowest figure in recent electoral history.
 - Liberal Democrats: 23%.**

As can be seen in the graph below, the Conservatives' 19% two-party lead is greater than any recorded by Labour in the 1990s except in the Conservatives' very worst year of 1995. Even with the strong systemic pro-Labour bias in the electoral system, anything approaching this lead in a General Election would be sufficient to give the Conservatives a very comfortable overall majority in the House of Commons.

Returning to local government, the May election results reinforced the trends identified in 2007. The Conservatives now control over 50% of councils in Great Britain and 57% of those in England, where they also hold nearly half of all council seats – in both cases more than Labour and the Lib Dems between them. The party's numerical strength, however, remains very unevenly spread, massively concentrated in the English shire counties and



districts. In Wales, though now controlling two councils, they are the third party, and in Scotland the fourth. The picture is similar in the large unitary metropolitan boroughs: the party controls only 6 of these councils, remains completely unrepresented in Liverpool, Sheffield, Gateshead and Newcastle Upon Tyne, while the only Conservative on Manchester's 96-seat council is a defected Liberal Democrat.

Estimated post-election council composition and control: Great Britain











	Number				% total					
	CON	LAB	LD	OTH	CON	LAB	LD	OTH		
Councillors										
London boroughs	784	682	319	76	42%	37%	17%	4%		
Metropolitan boroughs	621	1,093	585	146	25%	45%	24%	6%		
Unitary authorities	1,075	677	503	201	44%	28%	20%	8%		
County councils	1,152	570	473	74	51%	25%	21%	3%		
Shire districts	5,794	1,464	2,257	1,142	54%	14%	21%	11%		
Shadow Unitaries*	141	103	69	33	41%	30%	20%	10%		
England	9,567	4,589	4,206	1,672	48%	23%	21%	8%		
Welsh unitary authorities	174	342	162	578	14%	27%	13%	46%		
Scottish unitary authorities	143	348	166	371	14%	34%	16%	36%		
Great Britain	9,884	5,279	4,534	2,621	44%	24%	20%	12%		
Councils controlled										
London boroughs	14	7	3	0	8	44%	22%	9%	0%	25%
Metropolitan boroughs	6	12	4	0	14	17%	33%	11%	0%	39%
Unitary authorities	20	10	2	0	17	41%	20%	4%	0%	35%
County councils	23	6	3	0	2	68%	18%	9%	0%	6%
Shire districts	148	12	14	5	42	67%	5%	6%	2%	19%
England	211	47	26	5	83	57%	13%	7%	1%	22%
Welsh unitary authorities	2	2	0	0	18	9%	9%	0%	0%	82%
Scottish unitary authorities	0	2	0	3	27	0%	6%	0%	9%	84%
Great Britain	213	51	26	8	128	50%	12%	6%	2%	30%











* Cheshire East, Cheshire West & Chester, Durham and Northumberland

Better, however, to have increasing numbers unequally spread than continuously falling numbers, which is Labour's position, the party's 23% of councillors being fewer than at any time since local government reorganisation in the early 1970s. Lib Dem representation, having fallen in 2006 and 2007, increased fractionally in 2008, but the

<p>Elections to the ‘new’ unitary councils</p>	<p>party still has many fewer seats than during the period of the Conservatives’ greatest unpopularity in the mid-1990s.</p> <p>As noted above, the shadow or transitional councils of 4 of the 9 new English unitary authorities created out of the proposals in the 2006 White Paper and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act were also elected this year – those in the present counties of Cheshire, Durham and Northumberland (see July 25 above).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Cheshire the existing county council (51 councillors) and 6 districts (324 councillors in total) will be reduced to 2 unitaries: Cheshire East (81) and Cheshire West & Chester (72). The Conservatives will have majorities in both new councils. • In Durham the existing county council (63) will become the single unitary authority for the whole county, the 7 district councils (311) all being wound up. Labour won control of the new unitary council (126). • In Northumberland too – England’s 6th largest county with 500,000 hectares – the county council (67) will become the single unitary authority for the whole county, the 6 district councils (246) all being wound up. The new council (67) will be under No Overall Control, with the Lib Dems being the single largest party group. <p>Add up the above numbers and it will be seen that the democratic representation in these three counties has been reduced by 72%, from a total of 1,215 councillors to 346 – in a country that already has by far the highest number of residents per councillor in Western Europe.</p>
<p>London Mayoral election</p>	<hr/> <p>UK local elections rarely receive very much serious national media coverage, and this year they were completely overshadowed by London mayoral election, which attracted extensive international, as well as national, media attention. The attraction for most was the personality clash between the two leading candidates: Labour’s Ken Livingstone, the two-term incumbent, and the Conservative challenger, Boris Johnson, journalist and maverick Member of Parliament, selected as the party’s mayoral candidate the previous September in a unique primary election open to all London electors.</p> <p>The Mayor of London, like all directly elected mayors in England, is elected by the majoritarian Supplementary Vote (SV) system, in which electors may express preferences for their first and second choices of candidates. If no candidate receives a majority of first preference votes, all candidates except the top two are eliminated and any of their second preference votes cast for the top two candidates are allocated accordingly. The candidate with, necessarily, a majority after this second count is the winner.</p> <p>In this case, Livingstone, well behind Johnson after the first count, received nowhere near enough second preference votes for which he had so strongly campaigned – e.g. from Lib Dem and Green supporters – to overtake him in the second count. Due to the substantially increased turnout of 44.6% - nearly 9% up on 2004 – Livingstone’s total vote was in fact higher than those on which he had been elected in 2000 and 2004, but his final vote share was down by 8.6%. Boris Johnson thus became the first Conservative mayor of London and the most powerful elected Conservative politician in Britain.</p> <p>Even after the highest profile campaign imaginable, the distribution of second preference votes makes it clear that a large proportion even of those who voted failed properly to understand the working of the SV system. 87% of second preference votes were simply wasted, and could have been predicted to be wasted at the time they were cast.</p>

2008 Mayor of London election

Candidates	Party	1st preference		2nd preference*		2nd preference*	
		votes	%	votes	%	Re-used*	%
 Boris Johnson	Conservative	1,043,761	43.2%	257,792	12.9%	124,977	48.5%
 Ken Livingstone	Labour	893,877	37.0%	303,198	15.1%	135,089	44.6%
 Brian Paddick	Liberal Democrats	236,685	9.8%	641,412	32.0%	...	...
 Siân Berry	Green	77,374	3.2%	331,727	16.6%	...	...
 Richard Barnbrook	British National Party	69,710	2.9%	128,609	6.4%	...	...
 Alan Craig	Christian Peoples Alliance	39,249	1.6%	80,140	4.0%	...	...
 Lindsey German	Left List	16,796	0.7%	35,057	1.7%	...	...
 Gerard Batten	UK Independence Party	22,422	0.9%	113,651	5.7%	...	...
 Matt O'Connor	English Democrats	10,695	0.4%	73,538	3.7%	...	...
 Winston McKenzie	Independent	5,389	0.2%	38,954	1.9%	...	...
TOTAL		2,415,958	100.0%	2,004,078	100.0%	260,066	...

Candidates	Party	Final votes	
		votes	%
 Boris Johnson	Conservative	1,168,738	53.2%
 Ken Livingstone	Labour	1,028,966	46.8%
 Brian Paddick	Liberal Democrats	...	...
 Siân Berry	Green	...	...
 Richard Barnbrook	British National Party	...	...
 Alan Craig	Christian Peoples Alliance	...	...
 Lindsey German	Left List	...	...
 Gerard Batten	UK Independence Party	...	...
 Matt O'Connor	English Democrats	...	...
 Winston McKenzie	Independent	...	...
TOTAL		2,197,704	100.0%

Throughout the campaign there was never any serious prospect of a required second count being between any candidates other than Johnson and Livingstone. Yet nearly 1.5 million electors cast second preference votes for candidates who stood no realistic chance of being able to benefit from them, and a further 300,000 cast both first and second preference votes for the top two candidates, so their second votes could not be counted either. Put another way, if Livingstone could have attracted just one 1 in every 7 second preference votes cast for the Lib Dems and the Greens – both of whose supporters might reasonably be supposed to have preferred Livingstone to Johnson – he would have won, notwithstanding the loss of support Labour was experiencing elsewhere in the country.

The contrasting manifestos

While much of the media campaign coverage focused on the personalities – and alleged personality defects – of the two main candidates, there were significant differences, obviously, in their respective records and also in their manifestos. **Livingstone** claimed that under his 8-year mayoralty London has become one of the world's most successful cities, with more jobs, thousands more police officers, big improvements in bus transport and inner city congestion, better community relations, a leader in the adoption of effective environmental policies, and bid successfully for the 2112 Olympics. Future priorities would be:

- Managing London's biggest transport investments for 50 years, continuing to improve bus services, bringing more rail services under London's control to raise standards, and building the new Crossrail line;
- Making the Freedom Pass operate 24 hours a day, providing free bus travel for under-18s, and extending student travel discounts;
- Continuing to reduce crime by 6% each year, recruiting 1,000 more police and basing a permanent police team in every neighbourhood;
- Building 50,000 new affordable homes over three years and maintaining the policy that at least half of new homes are affordable by ordinary Londoners;

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- Providing new opportunities for young people in education and training and providing new safe places to go outside school hours;
- Improving the environment with a £25 charge on the ‘worst gas guzzlers’ (heaviest petrol-consuming vehicles) in the central London congestion charging zone and a zero charge for the least polluting cars.

Johnson’s chief campaigning issues were crime and community safety – “Londoners feel less safe on the streets as thuggish behaviour and violent crime increase” – transport, and value for money in London government. His future priorities included:

- Recruiting more police and improving efficiency;
- Implementing ‘serious strategies’ on knife and gun crime and arming the police with handheld weapon scanners;
- ‘Cracking down on the culture of casual disorder’ that leads to more serious crime, with live CCTV on buses and a community service scheme for young people who abuse free travel;
- Making transport safer by putting more uniformed officers on buses and station platforms;
- Scrapping Livingstone’s proposed £25 congestion charge and making the existing system fairer and more flexible;
- Working in partnership with local councils to build homes that people can afford;
- ‘Stretching the taxpayer pound’ to give Londoners better value for money, and cutting the waste and overspending at City Hall.

The 25 London Assembly members are elected by the Additional Member System (AMS) also used for elections to the Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales. There are 14 constituencies whose electors have two votes: one for a constituency member, elected using the ‘first-past-the-post’ system; the other for a party or for an Independent candidate on a London-wide list, the 11 ‘top-up’ seats being allocated so as to ensure the overall distribution of seats reflects the proportion of votes cast for each party or independent candidate.

As elsewhere in the country, the Conservatives were the principal winners in the 2008 Assembly elections, increasing their representation from 9 to 11 members. Labour, however, also gained a seat, and these two parties remained the only ones able to win the large constituency contests. The Liberal Democrats lost two of their top-up seats, as did the UK Independence Party, whose support has declined dramatically since 2004. The Greens retained their two top-up seats, and the British National Party won its first seat, having polled 5.4% in the London-wide ballot, or 0.4% above the threshold required for Assembly representation. Of the 25 Assembly members, 8 are women, three fewer than after the 2004 elections.

Party	2008			2004		
	<i>constituency</i>	<i>top-up</i>	<i>total</i>	<i>constituency</i>	<i>top-up</i>	<i>total</i>
 Conservative	8	3	11	9	0	9
 Labour	6	2	8	5	2	7
 Liberal Democrat	0	3	3	0	5	5
 Green	0	2	2	0	2	2
 British National Party	0	1	1	0	0	0
 UK Independence Party	0	0	0	0	2	2
TOTAL	14	11	25	14	11	25

<p><u>And finally ...</u></p>	<p>The Local Government Association published in April the first UK-wide list of local authority twinning links with overseas towns and communities – accessible at: http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/core/page.do?pageId=29208.</p> <p>The LGA survey found a total of 2,527 twinned town links in 87 countries. As would be expected, three-quarters of these links are with Western European countries, but 8% are with former Eastern bloc countries, 5% with Asia – including 15 with Japanese towns – and 2% with Africa. The Japanese links include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 London boroughs: Greenwich with Nishiwaki, Hyogo; Lambeth with Shinjuku, Tokyo • 3 metropolitan boroughs: Gateshead with Komatsu, Ishikawa; Sheffield with Kawasaki, Kanagawa; Wirral with Kyotonabe, Kyoto • 3 English unitaries: Chester with Omi-Hachiman, Shiga; Derby (+ Derbyshire County) with Toyota City; Portsmouth with Maizuru, Kyoto • 2 Scottish unitaries: Edinburgh with Kyoto prefecture; East Dunbartonshire with Yoichi-Cho, Hokkaido • 1 Welsh unitary – Flintshire with Kuga-Cho, Yamaguchi and also Murata-Machi, Miyagi. <p>The LGA survey gives no indication of the principal basis or attraction of the links, and even among the Japanese selection there is likely to be a mixture of economic, cultural and social ‘drivers’. It is pure authorial indulgence, therefore, that prompts me to mention two where little speculation is required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ottery St. Mary, a village in East Devon, with its (I think, characteristically rather different) ‘namesake town’, Otari-Mura, Nagano; • Gillingham (Medway) with Yokosuka, Kanagawa and Ito, Shizuoka. Gillingham is the birthplace of William Adams, and Gillingham’s twinning links underpinned the 1997 JLGC Study Tour, of which I was, and remain, extremely grateful to be a member.
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