

CLES Bulletin is a topical summary of an issue which has recently emerged. Its aim is to provide a pithy précis of the issue, thus creating a quick and easy to read document which directs to more detailed material, if required.

CLES Bulletin No. 36
Together We Can

CLES BULLETIN



‘Together We Can’

Introduction

‘Together We Can’ was launched at the end of June 2005, with the primary aim of setting out Government plans to reconnect citizens and state; empower individuals to play a role in shaping local services; and recreate a sense of mutual responsibility. This Bulletin will look at the context of ‘Together We Can’ as well as the structure of the programme and the core themes identified by the action plan. In order to do this it is necessary to:

- Consider the roles and responsibilities, arising from the action plan, of central and local government, public service providers, the voluntary and community sector (VCS) and citizens, and the associated schemes.
- Discuss the implementation of the action plan
- Consider the wider social policy considerations and linkages to public policy.
- Discuss core concerns surrounding ‘Together We Can’, and briefly consider the likely success of the ‘Together We Can’ action plan.

‘Together We Can’ is an action plan, which seeks to promote the active involvement of citizens, communities and public bodies in working together to improve people’s quality of life. It is led by the Home Office and involves twelve other government departments, namely:

- The Cabinet Office;
- The Department for Constitutional Affairs (DCA);
- The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS);
- The Department for Education and Skills (DfES);
- The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra);
- The Department of Health (DoH);
- The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI);
- The Department for Transport (DfT);

- The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP);
- Her Majesty’s Treasury (HMT);
- The Home Office (HO);
- The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM).

The programme seeks to both set out and also reiterate the Government and departmental plans to reconnect citizens and state as well as foster a sense of civic pride it draws on existing programmes of action as well as new policies all with the same aim.

Background and Context

In contrast to the relatively unsuccessful and largely property-dominated regeneration of the 1980s and early 1990s, the current Labour Government has largely focused its attentions on communities, on citizens and on neighbourhoods. Closing the inequality gap, reducing social exclusion and poverty and lessening deprivation have all become guiding themes, around which public policy has been structured.

The Government has continued to demonstrate its commitment to the least well off people and places and that it is acutely aware of the social and economic inequality that continues to exist within our communities as well as the disengagement of many citizens, and their continued disenfranchisement from political life. Indeed, initiatives to deal with the problems arising from these issues have been plentiful, since 1997 they have included:

- *The Neighbourhood Renewal Fund*, which aims to enable England’s most deprived local authorities, in collaboration with their Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), to improve services and narrow the gap between deprived areas and the rest of the country;
- *Community Empowerment Networks* (CENs), which allow members of the community to impact upon LSP decision making and priority setting;

- *The Active Citizenship Centre*, which has been created to promote research that demonstrates the value of civil renewal and inform policymaking and best practice;
- *Crime and Disorder Partnerships*, which were created to reduce crime and disorder in districts by bringing together agencies and communities who can help tackle local problems;
- *Sure Start*, which aims to achieve better outcomes for children, parents and communities;
- *New Deal for Communities*, which gives grants to community-based partnerships for neighbourhood renewal; and
- *Health Action Zones*, which aim to tackle inequalities and deliver better services, to name but a few.

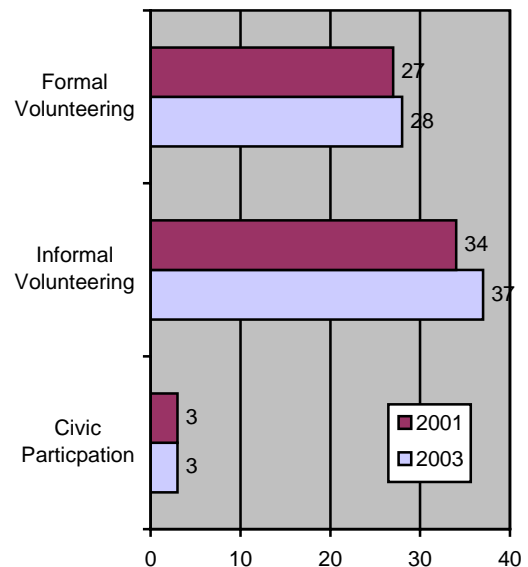
Alongside this renewed focus on the social aspects of regeneration, deprivation and inequality, which sees a focus on people rather than place, has come a focus on devolution of decision-making, local priorities and influences and citizen led public service reform. Local Area Agreements (LAAs), of which there are now 87 (1st and 2nd round together), which coupled with stronger leadership at local level are a means to allow stakeholders and communities to become and remain involved in local authority priority/budget setting and spending to meet those priorities. They support citizens to define and pursue their own ambition of what makes for good quality of life and well-being. Similarly, LSPs, supported by the CENs - as the voice of the voluntary and community sector and residents and communities themselves - allow locally determined priority setting and facilitate empowerment and capacity building within communities.

Nonetheless, these measures and the commitment to creating a new social order has not entirely created the equal, harmonious and successful communities and economies that the Government clearly desires; tensions remain; the

gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' is still great; civic pride is often still found to be lacking. An important factor in all this is that many individuals and organisations continue to feel disengaged from the processes of governance and public service provision - the Home Office Citizenship Survey from 2003 revealed that just three percent of respondents had participated in some form of civic participation at least once a month in the 12 months prior to the survey and just 27 percent some form of formal volunteering (See Figure 1).

Figure 1

Participation in voluntary activities at least once a month in the 12 months before interview, by type of activity, 2001 and 2003 (%)



In addition to this, only five percent of people admit to having attended a demonstration, six percent of people to having attended a political rally, 13 percent to having contacted a politician and just 70 percent of eligible people claim they would vote in a general election¹ (See Figure 2).

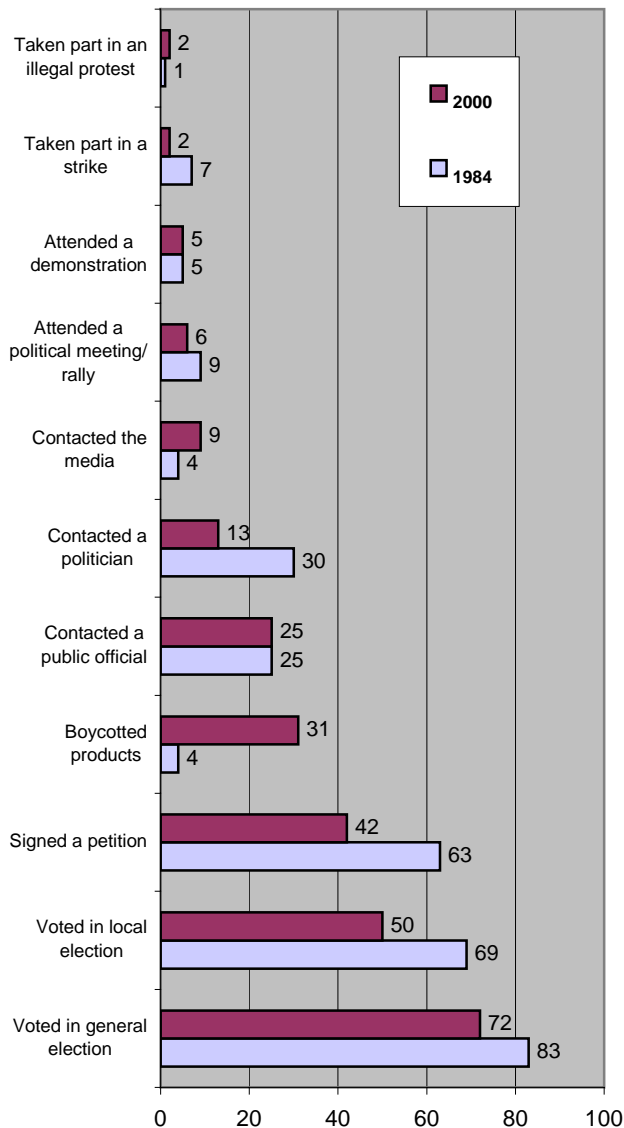
Thus, it is hoped that the broad 'Together We Can' action plan will tackle the declining levels of trust and engagement between politicians and

¹ In reality the average turnout is often much lower than this. The average for the 2005 general election was just 61.3 percent and as low as 57.1 percent in the North West of England.

citizens, and through the wider associated aims of empowerment and partnership working, create shared responsibility for public decision-making, allow local influences to shape local public service provision and promote the active involvement of citizens in their communities.

Figure 2

Changes in Political Participation 1984 - 2000 (% saying 'yes')



Key to this is the continued reform of public services and the sustained commitment, as mentioned earlier, by the Government to civil

renewal and equality in order to promote equal worth and real citizenship.

In all, Government ministers hope that 'Together We Can' will create a new social contract between the state and its citizens in order to secure mutual responsibility and mutual respect alongside economic opportunity and social security. David Miliband, Minister of Communities and Local Government, has said that a new social contract that will "mean shared expectations of what citizens will do for themselves and for each other,² and shared understanding about what they can expect from government." The Government hopes that these shared expectations will embody moral commitments and common values, allowing shared expectations to unite self-interest and common interest in a new social contract, with mutual responsibility at its heart.

The Government argues that the welfare state, however effective, cannot be a substitute for social networks, family and community, but it can support them. Instead, through 'Together We Can' and the Action Plan, the Government has focused on working together with citizens to help tackle poverty and deprivation. For example, through overcoming the worklessness that can undermine family life and by helping to improve childcare, early-years education and lifelong learning through support of Sure Start and extended schools. On the contrary, the 'Together We Can' Action Plan also states that citizens must face up to their responsibilities, to themselves, their children and to others and is inextricably linked to the reform of public services. It embraces the idea that a greater sense of ownership over their services and public spaces will nurture the values of cooperation and reciprocity that are key to successful and sustainable communities.

The 'Together We Can' themes and action plan

² Davis Miliband, speech to the 'Together We Can' conference, 28th June 2005

The plan sets out eight key public policy themes in which change will be sought, these are broadly in line with the responsibilities of several key Government departments and form part of the portfolio of responsibility of the participating departments and ministers. The key departments are indicated below, alongside the eight themes.

- Children and Young People (DfES);
- Democracy and Democratic Procedures (DCA);
- Regeneration and Neighbourhoods (ODPM);
- Community Cohesion and Equality (Home Office);
- Safer Communities (Home Office);
- Offending and the Criminal Justice System (Home Office);
- Health and Well-being (DoH); and
- Sustainability and the Environment (Defra).

In addition there are specific goals that are to be worked towards by each of the departments leading on each theme. Detailed below are the aims of each of these themes.

- **‘Together We Can’ ensure children and young people have their say** – this theme seeks to ensure that children and young people are involved in the planning and designing of the services that they use
- **‘Together We Can’ strengthen our democracy** – this is linked to the active involvement of all citizens in the governance of public services and the involvement in democracy
- **‘Together We Can’ revitalize neighbourhoods** - this theme is concerned with continuing to improve the quality of life in our neighbourhoods, both rural and urban.
- **‘Together We Can’ increase community cohesion and race equality** - related to the improvement of our communities, this theme

seeks to ensure that we have a shared sense of belonging and mutual respect for diversity.

- **‘Together We Can’ build safer communities** – concerned with the building of mutual respect and trust within communities and between communities and public service providers, for the benefit of all people involved.
- **‘Together We Can’ reduce re-offending and raise confidence in the criminal justice system** – this is about ensuring inclusive steps are taken to tackle crime, reduce re-offending and anti social behaviour.
- **‘Together We Can’ improve health and well-being** - this theme seeks to improve the quality of health amongst all sections of society, particularly the most vulnerable.
- **Together We Can secure our future** –this is concerned with environmental sustainability and liveability.

How does ‘Together We Can’ fit with other, wider policies/programmes and schemes?

‘Together We Can’ brings together existing programmes, policies, projects as well as funding streams in an attempt to create a holistic and inter-connected approach to improving people’s quality of life. Each of the eight themes includes several broad aims, which will involve inter-departmental working in order to meet targets, improve service delivery and reduce inequality and improve citizen relations with Government. The individual policies of the separate departments, which will contribute to the overall meeting of these targets, will remain the responsibility of the individual departments and the responsibility for meeting each target will be shared by all the departments involved with an individual target or theme. For example, ensuring young people have a clear role in influencing the decision about the ‘Connexions’ service is the responsibility of the Department for Education and Skills as is the policy to facilitate this, whereas ensuring children and

young people are directly involved in the design and delivery of integrated services, is the joint responsibility of seven departments: the Department for Education and Skills, the Home Office, the Department of Health, the Treasury, the ODPM, Defra and the Department for Culture Media and Sport.

In addition, these themes will be delivered regionally and locally by the nine Government Offices of the regions in England and the action plan will be updated every two years in light of the citizenship survey and consultation with a network of citizen organisations.

The lead departments involved in setting and delivering against the targets will measure success against these outcomes.

The 'Together We Can' Action plan will also prove of use to local authorities and practitioners, looking to translate central government policy to the local level and working to create holistic approaches to complex and multidimensional issues. It will act as guidance in ways to meet central targets as well as improve relations between local authority staff, elected members and their communities. It will also highlight best practice from around the country.

Despite the obvious commitment of the Government to the 'Together We Can' agenda and the support it demonstrates for the wider programme of community empowerment and civil renewal, there are serious concerns about the potential of the 'Together We Can' programme to effect significant and sustainable change. It has been suggested that the action plan does not represent any new focus to policy making within the specific departments or the government as a whole. Indeed the majority of the targets already exist in some form or another and policies to meet these targets are likely to remain largely unchanged. Moreover, there is little of new substance involved in the 'Together We Can' Action Plan, which on the whole, merely, reiterates existing policies. Nonetheless, this should not be seen as a weakness as

'Together We Can' is about putting these policies together in one place and joining up the process of governance in order to work towards the connected aims of alleviating poverty, tackling inequality and reinventing relations between citizens and the state. It also aims to give communities a bigger and better say in the running of the services that they use greater role in securing a better, more sustainable future for all. However, key changes in core Government policy is not part of the overall plan for 'Together We Can'

Where the Together We Can action plan and programme should be welcomed is the additional focus this brings to issues such as sustainability, poverty and inequality, public service reforms, as well as democracy and community cohesion. It champions ordinary people and showcases what's working well rather than focusing on the issues that are not working well. It further illustrates that active community involvement, in policymaking for public service provision, will result in better more sustainable policy. It also demonstrates the importance of involvement and engagement and values the role this can play in fostering improved community relations, an enhanced quality of life and strengthened relations between citizens and state. All of which are recognised and valued by the Government.

Conclusion – together, can we make a difference?

The 'Together We Can' action plan itself is a welcome reiteration of the existing Government commitment to tackling inequalities, improving health, reducing crime and strengthening democracy, and is strengthened by the joined – up, interdepartmental working that the Action Plan encourages. Thus, it is hoped that it will lead to a more holistic approach to tackling many of the complex problems facing communities and government today. It is also a demonstration of the Government's commitment to reducing inequality and

deprivation and further supports many existing programmes and policies.

Further Reading

- The Together We Can Summary document can be accessed from this website: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/docs4/TogetherWeCan_48ppBro_prt1.pdf
- The Together We Can Action Plan can be downloaded from this website: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/docs4/TogetherWeCan_48ppBro_prt2.pdf
- Imrie Rob and Mike Raco (2003), Urban Renaissance? New Labour, Community and Urban Policy, Policy Press, Bristol. *CLES Library Reference; 12L1*
- Home Office (2003), Citizenship Survey, <http://www.active-citizen.org.uk/files/downloads/Reports/hors289.pdf>
- The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal can be viewed and downloaded from the following website: <http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/publications.asp?did=85>

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