

## Local people to have greater say on spending

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<http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1002882&PressNoticeID=2453>

Neighbourhoods across England will be given new opportunities to direct extra resources at the issues they care about from tackling anti-social behaviour or drug-dealing to providing new community and leisure facilities, Hazel Blears said today.

In her first major speech as Communities Secretary, she set-out a radical vision for the next stage of the Government's devolution agenda with the ambition for every neighbourhood to have control of a 'community kitty' within five years.

She announced ten pilot projects which have been developed in Birmingham, Merseyside, Lewisham, Bradford, Salford, Sunderland, Newcastle, Southampton, Nottinghamshire (Manton) and St Helens.

**These will contribute to radical new plans to give local people a chance to examine and decide on how public budgets of up to more than £20 million are spent.**

First pioneered in Brazil, 'participatory budgeting' gives communities the ability to take control of budgets through community-led debates, neighbourhood votes and public meetings. It includes training for local people on how local council budgets work and how priorities are set.

This can enable local people to form an informed view, trigger action and direct resources at:

Funding extra Community Safety Wardens to patrol the streets and tackle anti-social behaviour;

Providing new play areas, greening public spaces, and improving the local environment;

Calming traffic to improve road safety; and

Funding extra police or CCTV.

In addition, she also announced £400,000 funding for projects in 20 areas where local authorities are working with communities to give them a chance to take ownership of assets in line with the recommendations of the Quirk Review.

Hazel Blears said the plans can help bring a step-change in devolving power to local people as part of Gordon Brown's vision for a 'reinvention of the way we govern' - promoting 'the active citizen, the empowered community, open enabling government'. She added that councils must move away from simply relying on the old orthodoxy of distributing grants and look at new ways to devolve power and control to community organisations.

Hazel Blears said:

*"We must put communities in control of the services that affect their lives.*

*"Local action is more important today than ever, especially for tackling anti-social behaviour, creating social enterprises, and environmental action.*

*"Everyone should have a real sense of power and control over aspects of their lives as diverse as their health services, whether they can cross the road safely, or how their local police operate.*

*"Democracy should be about much more than casting a vote every few years. It should be a daily activity, not an abstract theory.*

*"Local people know the needs of their area better than anyone. This Government is delivering a real shift in power to town halls, and ensuring town halls pass this on to local communities.*

*"We want to bring devolution to the doorstep, giving communities a direct say over how to tackle the things that matter most to them - from improving playgrounds, to tackling litter, to making their street safer."*

Participatory budgeting has been used on a small-scale by councils in the UK with small pots of money like community grants - **but there is considerable scope to extend it to major parts of local council funding like sports and leisure, transport, youth services, parks and green spaces and key infrastructure projects.**

Hazel Blears has asked the pilot projects to advise Government on taking this forward nationally including Newcastle, Bradford and others.

## Notes:

Case studies of both participatory budgeting and community ownership are available on request.

Hazel Blears' full speech to the LGA Conference : [www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1511749](http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1511749)

The ten pilot areas are:

1. Lewisham Borough Council
2. Bradford City Council
3. Salford City Council
4. Sunderland New Deal for Communities
5. Newcastle City Council
6. Southampton Primary Care Trust
7. Merseyside Waterfront Regeneration Partnership - working with a 1 million civic pride fund)
8. Manton (neighbourhood management area in Bassetlaw, Nottinghamshire)
9. St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council
10. Birmingham City Council

- 05 July 2007

20 Community Ownership Demonstration Areas have been announced today to share in £400,000 of funding to transfer up to 40 buildings into community ownership. They are:

Devon County Council;  
Restormel Borough Council;  
Hastings Borough Council;  
London Borough of Tower Hamlets;  
London Borough of Lambeth;  
London Borough of Lewisham;  
Darcorum Borough Council;  
Peterborough City Council;  
Forest Heath District Council;  
Nottingham City Council;  
Ashfield District Council;  
Birmingham City Council;  
Warwick District Council;  
Leeds City Council;  
Sheffield City Council;  
Kirklees Metropolitan Council;  
Cheshire County Council;  
Cumbria County Council;  
North Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council;  
Tynedale District Council.

Communities and Local Government are funding the Participatory Budgeting Unit to work with the ten pilot areas over the coming months

*- 05 July 2007*