

CUMBRIA ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS

STATEMENT OF POLICIES

2005



CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction	2
Local Councils and Sustainable Communities	3
Local Councils and Local Government	4
Housing	6
Public Transport	7
Private Transport and Highways	8
Planning and Development	9
The Local Environment	10
Tourism	11
Community Policing	12
Local Services and Facilities	13





INTRODUCTION

The Cumbria Association of Local Councils (CALC) is the Association of Town and Parish Councils and Parish Meetings in Cumbria. The Association is affiliated to the National Association of Local Councils.

This Statement of Policies was adopted by the General Meeting of the Association on 22 June 2005. The Association will seek to implement these policies by its own actions and by influencing the actions of others.

The policies will be kept under review. The most up-to-date version will be found on the Association's website www.calc.org.uk

In this document 'local councils' refers to town and parish councils.

July 2005

Any correspondence to the Association should be sent to:
CALC, Penrith Library,
St Andrew's Churchyard,
Penrith CA11 7YA.
Email: office@calc.org.uk

LOCAL COUNCILS AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

Town and Parish Councils – “local councils” – have been around for well over 100 years and their relevance to communities has never been greater than it is today. In these uncertain and changing times many communities feel powerless to influence the social and economic forces that are reshaping their familiar surroundings and equally frustrated by the actions and inactions of large public authorities that sometimes seem unable to respond appropriately to their particular local needs. Local councils can make a difference.

Local councils want their communities to be ‘sustainable’ in economic, social and environmental terms. Across Cumbria the character of communities varies considerably and the ways that communities will be sustained will be similarly wide. The people who are best placed to judge what is in the best interests of a community are those who live there. There may be wider considerations that also have to be taken into account, but the needs of the community as expressed by the community should always be the starting point.

Local councils have a wide range of powers that enable them to exert influence over what happens in their community, provided they choose to use those powers in a proactive and imaginative way. Most local councils see their role to be active in planning and acting on behalf of their communities.

However, CALC recognises that while many local councils in Cumbria are succeeding in taking on an active role within their communities, others are in need of encouragement and support. Past efforts are encouraging with CALC’s recently completed Parish Democracy Programme succeeding in achieving a measurable improvement in local council performance and activity over a three year period.

CALC’s policies are:

- 1. To encourage local councils to use their powers in a proactive way and provide leadership within their communities.**
- 2. To encourage local councils to communicate effectively with their communities and to conduct their business in a transparent way.**
- 3. To encourage local councils to work in partnership with local community and voluntary groups and other public bodies.**
- 4. To promote ‘good practice’ amongst local councils through the provision of - information, guidance and training programmes.**
- 5. To encourage local councils to prepare “Parish Plans” in partnership with both the local community and those authorities that will assist in their implementation.**
- 6. To encourage Principal Authorities and Local Strategic Partnerships to assist in the implementation of Parish Plans through Community Strategies and other plans.**





LOCAL COUNCILS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local councils are the first statutory tier of local government. In Cumbria they work alongside the two other tiers – the County Council and District Councils. Regionally there is a North West Regional Assembly where all three tiers of local government in Cumbria are represented.

In the future there is the prospect of enhanced roles for local councils arising from the current national debate about how to empower local people and create sustainable communities. Despite the deferment of plans for regional government, the prospect of Unitary Authorities remains and local councils need to anticipate enhanced responsibilities within new local government structures.

Principal Authorities (the County Council, City, Borough and District Councils) provide a wide range of services to local communities and local councils are well placed to support and complement their functions. One of the challenges facing the large Principal Authorities in Cumbria is to be sensitive to the diverse and individual needs of different communities. It is not always very easy to achieve. Efforts to be 'customer focussed' appear to dissipate in the sheer complexity of operations and the shortage of resources to find out what the 'customer' – the local community – really wants and how it could be delivered. In many cases 'one size fits all' seems to be the only practical approach to service delivery.

CALC believes that active, well run local councils can make a real contribution to overcoming these difficulties. Local councils can articulate the aspirations and needs of their community through town and parish plans, provide local knowledge to ensure 'joined up' service delivery, give constructive feedback on the effectiveness, or otherwise, of public policies and even take on the delivery of certain local services. The key requirement is properly organised

partnerships between local councils and other public authorities.

CALC welcomes the fact that the Government shares these aspirations for the parish tier of local government and is promoting the Quality Parish and Town Status scheme as an important part of its national policies for local government.

CALC's policies are:

- 1. To promote the national Quality Parish and Town Status scheme as a way of raising standards amongst local councils and achieving new, effective partnerships with other public authorities.**
- 2. To work jointly on the preparation of 'charters' between Principal Authorities and local councils which set out agreements on collaborative working, including how local councils will participate in:**
 - (i) policy making**
 - (ii) commissioning of services**
 - (iii) delivery of services through delegation**
 - (iv) scrutiny of service delivery.**
- 3. To manage a new three year "Quality Parish Development Programme" to increase the capacity of local councils and implement the Quality Parish scheme in Cumbria.**
- 4. To encourage very small parish councils to consider whether their effectiveness might be enhanced by amalgamating with one or**

more adjacent parishes, and to encourage *all* councils to explore the opportunities of working collaboratively with other councils.

5. To encourage councils to support the increasing professionalism amongst Clerks by offering modern terms of employment, by providing paid opportunities for training and gaining qualifications, and by supporting the trend of Clerks working for more than one council.

CALC believes that all communities, whether in a rural or an urban setting, can obtain real benefits from an active local council serving their interests. Some of the urban areas of Cumbria are currently unparished and therefore do not have a local council to represent the interests of the communities within them. A local council is democratically elected and therefore has a legitimacy to speak on behalf of its community and, in CALC's view, this needs to be recognised in the way other public authorities conduct consultations on new policies and proposals.

It is therefore the policy of CALC:

6. To promote the creation of local councils in the currently unparished areas of Carlisle City, Barrow, Whitehaven and Penrith.
7. To encourage all public authorities to use democratically elected local councils as their primary source of community opinion.





HOUSING

There is widespread concern amongst local councils about housing provision within their communities, particularly the impact high house prices are having on the affordability of housing for local people.

Many parts of Cumbria are attractive to second and holiday home owners, as well as commuters, and house prices have risen enormously in recent years. As a result, the opportunities for local and in particular young people to buy their first home, and continue to live and work in their local community, have been reduced. Adding to the problem is that many incomes are below that required to secure a mortgage for the cheapest open market house and 'right to buy' legislation has reduced the amount of social housing available.

Local councils wish to see housing policies that are sensitive to the particular needs of their communities. In many communities there is a need to further encourage the provision of affordable housing that is reserved for people who are genuinely local. There is also the need to permit new house construction where this will meet general housing demand and help support the viability of local services.

CALC recognises that housing strategies in the county do in most cases seek to address the issues of concern to local councils, but has concerns that limits on the levels of public subsidy for housing and the operation of the landuse planning system limit the pace of progress towards shared objectives.

The Cumbria and Lake District Joint Structure Plan (reflecting Regional Planning Guidance) sets a limit on the amount of land to be released for housing in different parts of the county. It reduces the annual build rate in South Lakeland and Eden in an effort to reduce the number of people moving into these districts from outside the area. CALC has

concerns that this approach may frustrate the satisfaction of housing needs in individual communities. The provision of housing that would be welcomed in a community and to which there are no overriding environmental objections, should not be prevented by regionally imposed quotas.

CALC's policies are:

- 1. Housing provision in a community should be guided by the needs and opportunities as seen by the community, unless there are exceptional reasons to do otherwise.**
- 2. Assessments of housing needs and opportunities should be prepared on a community basis and should be the main foundation for County and District housing policies.**
- 3. Policies that promote the provision of affordable housing for local people within larger housing developments, by the exceptional release of development land and by publicly subsidised housing schemes should be vigorously pursued.**
- 4. Arrangements that secure the reservation of housing for 'local' people should ensure that the occupants are genuinely local and the arrangement is long term.**

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Within many of Cumbria's communities the provision of public transport is minimal. The use of the car is therefore essential to meet daily travel needs, particularly in more remote areas. However, there are significant groups, such as young people, the elderly and those on low incomes who do not have access to a car and for whom the availability of public transport is essential if they are to continue to live in their community.

The continuation of many public transport services is reliant on the continuation of various public subsidies and on sufficient patronage to justify the subsidy. The levels of patronage are affected by the quality of service provided, the ready availability of travel information, marketing and the integration of various transport modes.

With the gradual decline in commercial public transport, the role of various kinds of community transport has become increasingly important. These services can be very responsive to local requirements and make a significant contribution to maintaining access to services outside the immediate community.


The government's Rural Strategy states that transport remains a key issue for improving access to services, and thereby underpinning social and economic regeneration. It notes that recent changes to the regulatory regime governing buses and the introduction of "accessibility planning" in 2005 offer potentially significant gains for rural areas. Local authorities will, for the first time, be able to support the best mix of fixed bus services, flexible bus services, and community transport, to meet the needs of their residents and visitors.

CALC's policies are:

- 1. To encourage the County Council to continue to support public transport services by maintaining and increasing levels of financial support, and encouraging providers to trial more innovative forms of incentives to travel.**
- 2. To support the development and coordination of community transport initiatives, including, where feasible, utilising public service vehicle fleets for community use.**
- 3. To encourage the improvement of information and publicity for all forms of public transport, including with the assistance of local councils.**
- 4. To support better integration of different transport services and modes, and better facilities for people who need to use private transport, to get to public transport services.**



PRIVATE TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS



The car is the primary mode of transport for people in Cumbria and contributes greatly to quality of life through the accessibility it provides. Although restraint on car use may be necessary in some circumstances, as a general rule transport policy should seek to harness the accessibility benefits that car use brings, particularly within and from remoter areas where there is often no alternative. Within towns and large villages car use should be appropriately managed, whilst retaining convenient access through good parking facilities and other measures.

The proper maintenance and management of the highway network, including public rights of way, is a perennial issue for local councils. Many highways maintenance and management concerns are often very local in nature and the challenge for local councils is to find out how to address them through the complexities of the Local Transport Plan and Highway Authority procedures.

The priority for most local councils is to see small highway maintenance problems dealt with speedily before they become big problems and for local traffic management needs to be satisfied quickly in a manner sensitive to local circumstances. They also want to see more substantial proposals for highway improvements progressed within an understandable scheme of prioritisation.

CALC has already proposed to the Highway Authority that policies, programmes and procedures need to be much more transparent and accessible to local councils. There need to be information systems that allow local councils to see progress on the issues they have raised. Some improvements in this respect are underway in terms of both information and consultation.

CALC's policies are:

- 1. To encourage national transport policies to be applied in a manner which reflects the geographical circumstances in Cumbria and the particular needs of its dispersed communities.**
- 2. To achieve early consultation with local councils on the details of specific capital schemes included in the Local Transport Plan.**
- 3. To ensure consultation with local councils on the Annual Package of Measures for Minor Works, to make best use of their local knowledge of issues and to keep them informed of progress.**
- 4. To encourage the provision of readily accessible information about progress on schemes and other works, and on Highway Authority procedures and methods of prioritisation.**
- 5. To provide all local councils with a 'fast track' procedure to report highways defects to named officers and subsequently monitor progress.**
- 6. To press for the early introduction of 30 mph speed limits for all rural villages, and to encourage the voluntary manning of speed guns to enforce these limits.**
- 7. To press for further devolution of certain highway maintenance functions, including on public rights of way, to local councils and local contractors.**

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

The way the Town and Country Planning system controls development in their communities of considerable interest to all local councils. On occasions the decisions of local planning authorities are contrary to the views expressed by local councils, and if this happens regularly local councils begin to lose confidence in the consultation arrangements.

Local councils are held accountable in their communities for the judgements they make on what developments are acceptable. Generally they will seek to support developments that bring tangible benefits in terms of employment, housing and services and resist those that would cause environmental harm.

Local councils expect their judgements on what is best for their community to be listened to seriously. In the same way that an applicant for planning permission is given written reasons if his proposal is rejected, a local council can reasonably expect a written explanation if its views are not accepted by the Planning Authority.

CALC accepts that local councils need a proper understanding of the planning system and those matters that are relevant, or not, to planning decisions. It is important for local councils to understand the new planning arrangements and contribute to the Regional Spatial Strategy and Local Development Frameworks where policies will be adopted that ultimately determine how development proposals in their community will be determined.

CALC's policies are:

- 1. To encourage local councils to respond to consultations on the Regional Spatial Strategy, Statements of Community Involvement, and Local Development Frameworks.**
- 2. To promote flexible planning policies which allow development proposals to be evaluated within their unique community context, rather than solely by the application of blanket regional and local policies.**
- 3. To encourage local councils to adopt appropriate procedures to meet consultation deadlines on both plans and planning applications.**
- 4. To encourage local planning authorities**
 - **to meet with a local council in the event of a local council's views on a planning application being at variance with the planning officer's recommendation**
 - **to continue the good practice of inviting local council representation on site visits**
 - **to provide a written explanation in all cases where the local planning authority's decision does not accord with the local council's views.**
- 5. To collaborate with Local Planning Authorities in the delivery of training for local councils about the operation of the planning system.**





THE LOCAL ENVIRONMENT

Local councils are well placed to care for the environment within and surrounding their communities and to take action directly. Their powers and duties include the power to acquire land for or to provide recreation grounds, public walks, pleasure grounds and open spaces, and to manage and control them. They may also acquire land for new open spaces, provide litter bins, roadside seats, shelters and bus shelters, plant trees, maintain roadside verges, and repair and maintain public footpaths and bridleways.

The preparation of market town action plans, parish plans and village design statements can help identify local priorities, and the local council, in partnership with other community groups, can make use of a wide range of funding sources to implement schemes.

A widespread concern for many communities is the misuse and encroachment on village greens and commons. The management of these areas is often problematical. CALC is able to give advice, including legal advice, to help solve problems and the Government is planning new legislation to assist in the beneficial management of common land.

CALC's policies are:

- 1. To encourage local councils to identify priorities for local environmental improvements and to work collaboratively with other community groups to plan and implement schemes.**
- 2. To encourage the further delegation of responsibility for environmental management and improvement to local councils.**
- 3. To support initiatives that improve the management and use of common land and village greens.**

TOURISM

The tourism industry makes a major contribution to the county's economy generating £1billion expenditure annually and supporting some 34,000 jobs. Local councils generally welcome the economic benefits that tourism can bring to local communities in terms of jobs and the income generated for local businesses, including farm enterprises.

Nevertheless, local councils do expect tourism businesses to be developed in a manner that respects the character of the local communities that 'host' them. In rural areas there are sometimes concerns about the scale of developments, their impact on the landscape and the amount of traffic they generate. These concerns need to be addressed through firm planning policies and early consultation on development proposals.

CALC's policies are:

- 1. To support tourism developments, provided that in scale and character they are compatible with the local community and the environment.**
- 2. To encourage support for the development of locally based tourism businesses, including farm enterprises.**
- 3. To seek appropriate measures to manage tourist traffic (including coach traffic), particularly in quiet country areas.**





COMMUNITY POLICING

Local councils welcome the opportunities for partnership with the police to reduce crime and the fear of crime. For such a partnership to be effective, however, local councils and their communities need constant dialogue with local police officers and a visible police presence.

Local councils therefore welcome Cumbria Police Authority's various policies to increase community engagement, including the policy to establish Local Policing Teams, covering each community in Cumbria. Seventy new officers have already been recruited. Each officer is dedicated to one ward and will be visible in their area and accessible to local people.

Police officers are encouraged to attend local council meetings and local council representatives contribute to the work of Community Liaison Forums.

CALC's policies are:

- 1. To support the Local Policing Teams and to encourage the increased allocation of resources to recruit more officers.**
- 2. To encourage local councils to participate in the preparation of the Annual Policing Plan, and to contribute to other opportunities for participation, such as Community Liaison Forums and Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships.**
- 3. To encourage local councils to involve Local Policing Teams and other community safety bodies in the preparation of Parish Plans.**
- 4. To assist in the establishment of additional community sites where local policing services can be accessed.**
- 5. To support the appointment of police staff Community Support Officers, the use of volunteers and other approaches to involve the community in policing activities.**

LOCAL SERVICES AND FACILITIES

For local councils the gradual loss of local services and facilities in response to changing social and economic trends is a matter of the long standing concern.


In many parishes, village shops are being lost, and some are only marginally viable. Pubs are closing and the viability of those without a thriving restaurant role is often a matter of concern. Similarly, post offices continue to decline, particularly in the more remote rural areas. There are plans to reduce the number of public telephone and public toilets. With respect to village halls, there is a dearth of funding for capital projects, ever more onerous regulations and the hemorrhaging of volunteers prepared to shoulder responsibility. Despite the Education Authority's commitment to small schools, it is faced with many surplus places at primary level, and budget pressures bring closure along.

There are, however, examples around of innovative approaches to service provision that give some cause for hope – new retailing methods, shared and multiple use of buildings and co-operative and community enterprises. In addition the Internet has increased access to a very wide range of services and the availability of broadband services is now widely sought. However, innovative solutions need time to be brought to fruition and too often, when closures are announced it is then too late to intervene and seek alternatives.

CALC's policies are:

1. To encourage local councils to have regular dialogue with their local providers of services and facilities, to promote the use of local services ("use it or lose it") and to assist in other ways such as including features and advertising in parish newsletters.
2. To urge public service providers to prepare and publish 'Community Impact Statements' when a service or facility is threatened. These should justify the closure proposals, consider any 'knock on' effects on other services and indicate what alternative provision will be available.
3. To urge all providers of services or facilities that are threatened with closure to give the community co-operation and the maximum time possible to explore innovative alternatives.
4. To ensure local councils are well briefed about grants and innovative schemes that might assist in the maintenance of local services.





calc cumbria association of local councils

**Penrith Library, St Andrew's Churchyard, Penrith CA11 7YA.
Tel: 01768 242141 Fax: 01768 242144 Email: office@calc.org.uk**