

Spotlight

Welcome to the Spotlight briefing note, providing a summary of the latest announcements from central Government. With the new Coalition Government in place, it is vital that the authority is fully informed about the emerging policy agenda. This note will be circulated on a weekly basis to all Members and Managers.

You are the experts in your respective areas. Given the dynamic nature of announcements from Government at the present time this briefing will be out of date as soon as it is published, therefore if you come across an official announcement that affects your area, please let us know by contacting:

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Each of the titles in **blue underlined text** in this document is a link to the source information on the internet; please click on them to find out more information.

STOP PRESS

[First wave of local enterprise partnerships as Government green lights local growth](#)

Local councils and local business including a successful bid from Cheshire West and Chester (with partners Cheshire East and Warrington) will take charge of the local economy as the first 24 local enterprise partnerships have been given the go-ahead.

[Local Areas get 'Community Budgets' to help the vulnerable](#)

Sixteen areas have been given direct control over local spending in their area free of centrally imposed conditions as part of the Spending Review.

Cheshire West and Chester will be working with the Cabinet Office on involving communities in designing and commissioning services that better meet local need.

[Business plans published](#)

The Prime Minister has published business plans that set out in detail the work of Government for the next four years. These cover all 17 Departments in Whitehall.

The plans include data such as financial information, Structural Reform Plans and departmental priorities.

They mark the start of a major change in the way government works and will bring about a power shift in favour of increased Government accountability directly to the public.

[New transparency website](#)

Resources Directorate

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[The White Paper “Universal Credit: welfare that works”](#)

The White Paper “Universal Credit: welfare that works”, published on 11 November 2010, sets out the Coalition Government’s plans to introduce legislation to reform the welfare system by creating a new Universal Credit. Universal Credit will radically simplify the system to make work pay and combat worklessness and poverty. The White Paper outlines:

- the need for change
- how Universal Credit will work
- how it will affect benefit recipients, and its broader impact.

[Cheshire West and Chester Council provides a ‘fair’ and fast-improving benefits service](#)

The benefits service provided by Cheshire West and Chester Council is 'fair' with 'excellent' prospects for improvement, according to an independent report released today by the Audit Commission.

On a scale from zero to three stars, the Audit Commission inspection team gave the service a one star, 'fair' rating. The new council has worked well to merge the previous district councils benefits services into one and residents now receive a streamlined service. Customers can easily get help and advice about benefits and the service works positively to prevent and deal with benefit fraud. The Council has done a lot of work to make sure that everyone in the area is claiming what they are entitled to. However, there is still further work to be done so that claims are dealt with quicker.

[Consultation responses to 21st Century Welfare](#)

In July of this year the DWP published 21st Century Welfare (Cm 7913), a consultative paper that laid out the problems of poor work incentives and complexity in the benefits and Tax Credit systems, and set out the key principles for reform.

DWP asked people to send in views on their proposals and give them suggestions for reform. The consultation period ran from 30 July to 1 October and they received 1,668 responses.

[Area Based Grant](#)

Area Based Grant is a general grant allocated directly to local authorities as additional revenue funding to areas. It is allocated according to specific policy criteria rather than general formulae. Local authorities are free to use all of this non-ringfenced funding as they see fit to support the delivery of local, regional and national priorities in their areas.

The latest allocations can be found in the link above.

[Implications of new government](#)

Speech by Baroness Hanham at the Centre for Public Scrutiny Conference detailing the effects of the new ‘Big Society’ on Local Government.

Adult Social Care & Health

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[Homecare Re-ablement Toolkit - Updated](#)

CSED has put together a toolkit to help councils looking to introduce a new homecare re-ablement service or extend or improve an existing service. This has been updated.

It has been developed as a practical project support to councils and builds on extensive work done by CSED in:

- compiling a body of evidence on how homecare re-ablement services are helping to appropriately reduce the level of ongoing homecare support required
- working actively with councils to identify successful approaches, learning points and best practice

[Scrutiny of vetting and barring scheme gets underway](#)

The system of checks that people working with children and vulnerable adults are required to undergo will be considered afresh in a radical examination of the Vetting and Barring Scheme (VBS).

The Government today outlined the terms of a thorough review of the VBS which will re-examine whether the scheme is the most appropriate mechanism to protect children and vulnerable people and, if so, how many roles should be covered by it.

In June the Home Secretary, Theresa May, made clear the Government's intention to bring the scheme back to common sense levels. This was in response to public concerns that in its current form the scheme was overly bureaucratic and burdensome.

Children and Young People

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[Michael Gove writes to local authorities about academies](#)

The Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, has written to local authorities about their role in identifying underperforming schools that would benefit from becoming academies.

[New approach for Children's Trust Boards](#)

All evidence and experience suggests stronger partnerships, greater integration of services and a shared purpose for all those working with and for children and families lead to better services for children, young people and families – especially the most vulnerable. The core principle of a shared commitment to improve the lives of children, young people and families – enshrined in the 'duty to cooperate' on local strategic bodies – remains as important as it ever was.

But the current system needs urgent reform. The Coalition Government is determined to let local professionals come together in the way that best fits local circumstances and needs.

The commissioning packs will provide GPs with a set of tools and templates to use when designing and buying services for their patients. The first of these support packs published today is for cardiac rehabilitation services and aims to support GP commissioners to design services that are suited to local needs and cost effective

[Education Secretary commits £110m to weakest schools](#)

The Secretary of State for Education has allocated £110 million to establish an education endowment fund (EEF) designed to raise standards in underperforming schools.

The EEF will distribute money to local authorities, academy sponsors, charities and other groups that

bring forward innovative proposals to improve performance in our most challenging schools. Those bidding for funds from the EEF will have to outline how their proposals will raise attainment.

[School governors encouraged to consider academy freedoms](#)

Governors from outstanding schools across England are being encouraged to consider the Coalition Government's offer to take up academy freedoms.

In an open letter ahead of his speech to the National Governors' Association, Lord Hill said:

Since the start of the new term 80 outstanding schools have now opened as academies, and over 60 more have taken up our offer to convert in the coming months. It is very encouraging that so many governors and headteachers are using this opportunity to take control of their schools and become academies

Community and Environment

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[Home Secretary announces Prevent review](#)

A review of the government's strategy for preventing violent extremism and the new reviewer of counter terrorism powers were announced today by Home Secretary Theresa May.

The review of Prevent will assess how the current strand of the government's counter-terrorism programme can work more effectively. The conclusions will inform a refreshed strategy to be published next year.

[Controlled Waste Regulations consultation published](#)

A consultation on proposals to replace or amend the Controlled Waste Regulations (1992) relating to certain non-domestic properties was today launched by Defra and the Welsh Assembly Government.

Defra and the Welsh Assembly Government have been working with relevant stakeholders for over two years and have found that the Regulations are causing many problems for local authorities and their customers because they are difficult to interpret and use out of date terminology. It was also felt that the Regulations distort the market by preventing local authorities from making a charge where they feel necessary for the disposal of waste from certain non-domestic properties. **Due date – 14th January 2011**

Regeneration and Culture

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[Huhne heralds green homes revolution](#)

Thousands of new insulation workers will soon be hitting Britain's streets as part of a national effort to make people's homes warmer and cheaper to run.

Chris Huhne, Energy and Climate Change Secretary, today said that by 2015 up to 100,000 Green Deal workers could be employed in the effort to upgrade Britain's homes. Currently around 27,000 work in the insulation industry. Legislation to start the process of establishing the Green Deal is due to be introduced into Parliament next month.

[The Green Deal](#) is the Government's new and radical way of making energy efficiency available to all, whether people own or rent their property. The work to upgrade the property will be paid back from the saving on energy bills.

[Grant Shapps: Rewards for homes with the New Homes Bonus](#)

Housing Minister Grant Shapps today pledged cash for communities who allow new homes to be built in their area. Almost £1bn Government funding has been set aside for councils that welcome new housing development, which they will be able to spend to benefit their local community.

In proposals that will be published for consultation, the Minister will announce that the Government will match the council tax raised from new homes for the first six years through the New Homes Bonus. Councils and communities will work together to decide how to spend the extra funding - whether council tax discounts for local residents, boosting frontline services like rubbish collection or providing local facilities like swimming pools and leisure centres.

[Letter to Chief Planning Officers: Abolition of Regional Strategies](#)

Letter to local planning authorities following the judgement in the case brought by Cala Homes in the High Court, which considered that the powers set out in section 79 [6] of the *Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009* could not be used to revoke all Regional Strategies in their entirety.

[Revisions to the Code for Sustainable Homes: Impact Assessment](#)

This Impact Assessment is part of the Code for Sustainable Homes 2010 publication pack.

The Impact Assessment has been undertaken following the Consultation which took place earlier this year. It examines the options underpinning the main changes made to the Code.

[National Rough Sleeping Conference](#)

Speech by Housing Minister Grant Shapps at the National Rough Sleeping Conference 2010.

[New incentives for councils to support local firms and create new jobs](#)

New proposals unveiled today could give Councils a renewed incentive to grow their local economies and attract new businesses to their areas.

Ministers have set out radical new proposals to look at ways for Local Authorities to keep the business rates they collect locally, thereby reducing central redistribution. However, the Government is clear any change must be to encourage growth and not lead to an increased tax burden on business.

The announcement was made as part of a White Paper on Local Growth published today that seeks to rebalance the economy and drive sustainable growth.

[Shutting the door to squatters](#)

Making homeowners as aware of their rights as those looking to take over their properties will help shut the door to squatters, said Housing Minister Grant Shapps.

Mr Shapps has launched an online guide for homeowners setting out their rights and what to do if their property is invaded, so they can get their homes back as quickly as possible.