



Introduction

The Localism Bill 2010-11 was introduced into the House of Commons at the beginning of December 2010, and should pass into law by the end of 2011. Regulations needed to actually implement it should be completed by April 2012. Sponsored by Communities Secretary Eric Pickles, the Bill is part of the Government's 'Big Society' agenda, aiming to give more discretion to Local Authorities in the way that they operate, and more power to citizens in their influence over what Local Authorities do. It has received a generally positive reception from the local government community, including the Local Government Association, the National Association of Local Councils, although the devil will be in the detail as the bill goes through the legislative stages. There are ten key proposals relating to Local Government, Community Empowerment, Housing and Planning, all of which are subject to amendment during the Committee Stages of the Bill:

Summary

	Proposals
1	A general ' power of competence ' for Local Authorities. Seeks to provide confidence to councils to undertake any actions necessary to deliver for communities in a way that addresses deficiencies in the previous 'wellbeing' power.
2	Local Authority governance: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• An option to revert to the 'committee system', without Overview and Scrutiny committees• An option to have a directly elected mayor (for the twelve largest cities, this is not an option – they must hold a referendum on this)• Removal of the requirement to have a petitions scheme (although a petition can still trigger a referendum)• Removal of the power to charge for certain statutory items
3	'Predetermination' – Councillors who have campaigned on an issue will no longer be barred from speaking or voting on that issue.



4	Abolition of the Local Authority Standards regime , including the Standards Board for England, the model code of conduct for Councillors and the statutory Local Authority Standards Committee
5	Publication of senior officers' pay policy
6	European Union fines payable by Local Authorities if they incur them, rather than by the Government
7	Business Rates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business Rate Supplements must be supported by a ballot of rate payers, whatever proportion of a project the supplement is paying for • Local Authorities can give discounts as they see fit, rather than following laid down criteria
8	Community empowerment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A referendum must be held on local issues if certain conditions are met, including a petition of more than 5% of the population, or by request of members • 'Excessive' Council tax increases will trigger a referendum • Community right to challenge – community and voluntary organisations or employees can make an Expression of Interest in running a council service • List of Assets of Community Value – the Council must keep a list of all land and buildings deemed to be of value to the community, and potentially offer them to community groups before disposal
9	Planning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abolition of regional strategies – replaced with 'duty to cooperate' • Reform of Planning System • 'Neighbourhood development plans will have legal planning force • Neighbourhood Development Order/Community 'Right To Build' • Community Infrastructure Levy retained and reformed • Pre-application engagement on major consultations • Planning enforcement powers strengthened • Financial considerations in planning applications



10 **Housing**

- Fixed term tenancies
- Exclusions from housing waiting list permissible
- Discharge of duty possible into private sector
- National Homeswap scheme
- HCA replaces TSA as regulator
- Complaints process reformed