

Need more help?

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Localism Act

Freedoms, flexibility, transparency and governance

A bitesize guide

Introduction

The Localism Act contains a number of proposals to give local authorities new freedoms and flexibility to enable them to more easily respond to what local people want.

The Localism Act and Governance

The main areas covered by the Act are:

- General power of competence.
- Abolition of the current standards regime and national regulator Standards for England.
- Limiting the effect of the rules relating to predetermination.
- Greater control over business rates.
- Transparency over senior council officials' pay.
- Public right to approve or veto excessive council tax rises.
- Allowing Councils to decide what their executive or committee governance arrangements will be.

What does the Localism Act mean for you?

- The general power of competence gives Councils the power to do anything that an individual can do but subject to limitations.
- The Council must have a Code of Conduct and a register of members' interests and it will in some cases be a criminal offence if you fail to comply with the rules relating interests.
- The Council's decisions will not be so easily open to challenge because you may have expressed a view on a particular matter that you later participate in and vote on.
- The Council will have more freedom to allow business rates discounts.
- The Council may choose between the executive style of governance and the committee system.
- The Council will need to hold a referendum for approval to increase council tax above the level set by the Government.
- The Council must adopt and publish a statement of their policies on pay, including the salaries of senior officials.

How will it work?

The Council will need to make decisions on what its Code of Conduct will say; its governance structure and its pay policy statement.

If the Council offers business rates discounts it will need to meet the cost from local resources.

The general power of competence does not give a complete freedom to act and so care will need to be taken as biggest test of the power is likely to be in the courts.

The Council will also have greater flexibility about how they carry out the scrutiny role of other local public bodies such as the NHS and courts.

Myth buster

The Localism Act sets out a series of measures to devolve powers to local government so that local people can achieve their own ambitions.

There are however, a number of areas where the Council would need to get approval from the Secretary of State and there are some limitations on the influence that local people and groups will be able to have.