

31 January 2005

ODPM announcements on Neighbourhoods, Local Leadership and Sustainable Communities: Press comment from the Local Government Information Unit

The comment below from the Local Government Information Unit responds to the papers launched today (31 January) by the Office of the Deputy Prime Ministers on *"Sustainable Communities: People Places and Prosperity"*, *"Citizen Engagement and Public Services: Why Neighbourhoods Matter"* and *"Vibrant Local Leadership"*.

Dennis Reed, Chief Executive of the Local Government Information Unit, said: "There are heartening signs that ministers want to encourage good local leadership by removing the various barriers that prevent a diverse range of talented people coming forward for public service. That's exactly what the LGIU has been saying in our 'Perilous Democracy' campaign.

"There are also encouraging indications that ministers realise the value of working to improve existing and relatively well-understood institutions of local governance, such as the role of the frontline ward councillor, rather than embarking on pointless reform processes that simply result in such roles having to be reinvented.

"The key role of the representative ward councillor has been weakened in recent times. It needs to be restored and the notion that the quality of councillors can be improved simply by cutting their number needs to be discarded. This country's electors already have the weakest level of local democratic representation of any European democracy.

"The main task for central government now must be to give ward councillors real clout both in their local neighbourhoods and at the town hall. This means providing greater local choice and flexibility over governance models and moving ahead with other reforms to empower local government in crucial areas such as finance."