

Local Government Information Unit

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Whitehall Red Tape could scupper local partnerships

Local partnerships to 'join up' the local delivery of public services could grind to a halt without changes to government policy, according to a new report launched by the Local Government Information Unit (LGIU).

Since the 1980s local partnerships have flourished, bringing together local stakeholders such as councils and other statutory agencies such as the police, the private, voluntary and community sectors to undertake joint planning and delivery of services. Building on case studies from five local authorities, the report, entitled Rationalising Partnerships and Plans, highlights best practice where local authorities used their local strategic partnerships and community strategies to develop a more coherent framework for joining up the existing plethora of local partnerships and plans.

However, from 1997 the government's approach has been to centralise the process of partnership working, replacing local freedoms and flexibilities with a plethora of Whitehall-inspired specific initiatives aimed at tackling social, economic and environmental problems. This has created more bureaucracy and confusion among the public about who is providing local services and how to access them.

One council in the report noted that 'we are currently drowning in a sea of initiatives and there is a real need to rationalise at the local level'. The majority of councils surveyed felt that there was not just a need to cut the number of partnerships or plans in operation, but also to make them connect more strategically. The report makes a number of policy recommendations.

Austen Cutten, a Policy Officer at the LGIU and author of the report, said: "This LGIU report shows that many local authorities are working to make the idea of local partnerships a reality.

"However, the Government's attempts so far at rationalising the system have had little impact. There is a real danger that much good local work on promoting joined up service delivery will grind to all halt without the Government lightening the burden of Red Tape."

ENDS

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Notes to Editors

1. The Local Government Information Unit (LGIU) is Britain's foremost independent local democracy think tank, campaigning to extend local authority best practice, freedoms and responsibilities. Recent initiatives have included the Commission on Local Governance and the LGIU is working to influence the debate on local government modernisation. The LGIU and its sister organisations The Education Network (TEN) and the Democratic Health Network (DHN) provide research, policy briefings, information, advice, training and lobbying services to local authority and trade union affiliates. Previous LGIU news releases and statements can be viewed at www.lgiu.gov.uk <<http://www.lgiu.gov.uk>>.

2. For a full copy of the report Rationalising Partnerships and Plans, contact Kevin Morton on kevin.morton@lgiu.org.uk <<mailto:Kevin.morton@lgiu.org.uk>> or Austen Cutten on Austen.cutten@lgiu.org.uk.