

URBAN FORUM COMMUNITY MANIFESTO

to deliver lasting change in England's urban communities

Urban regeneration will not be possible if policy making fails to take account of the needs and interests of local communities, as is being increasingly reflected in the language used by all the main political parties. However, there remains a significant gap between this rhetoric and practical reality. In producing this Community Manifesto, Urban Forum aims to ensure that the needs of the community sector are reflected in government policy making.

This Manifesto sets out the policy recommendations from the community sector and we call on the future government to implement these changes that will deliver real change for local communities. The Manifesto has been developed following widespread consultation with community groups involved in

regeneration; and it sets out their concerns, aspirations and policy recommendations.

At the heart of this Manifesto are three core principles – Community Participation, Community Development and Community Ownership. Only by integrating these principles into policy development will regeneration which genuinely improves the lives of local communities be possible.

Urban Forum is a national umbrella body for community and voluntary groups involved in urban and regional policy, especially regeneration and neighbourhood renewal.



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MANIFESTO
DETAILS

COMMUNITY MANIFESTO

Community Participation

Community involvement must be embedded consistently throughout government and go beyond just service delivery and governance. Communities and the community sector must be involved at all stages of decision-making, from conception and development through to implementation and assessment. A wide range of participative methods exist and should be used to encourage action, not just talk.

Volunteering and the Benefits System

Aim: Ensure that the Benefits System works effectively and consistently to support community engagement and skills development

By:-

- Reforming the benefits system to remove the barriers to community engagement
- Greater recognition of the contribution of volunteering in regeneration and minimum standards of support

Devolution and community leadership

Aim: Deliver genuine devolved decision-making to local communities with clearly defined power-transfer, objectives and suitable structures, training and support

By:-

- Embedding Local Area Agreement principles into all programmes that affect local communities to enable greater flexibility and encourage local difference.
- Encouraging debate on the differing and complementary roles of community representatives and local councillors

Building public sector capacity

Aim: Address the current lack of understanding within the public sector of the value and contribution the community sector makes to urban regeneration and social inclusion

By:-

- Building capacity and knowledge among elected members and government officials through a learning and development programme in community development and participation
- Training and ongoing support to be made available at local, regional and central government level for officials and members connected with community engagement.
- All persons appointed to Local Strategic Partnerships, or directly associated bodies, must have completed the learning and development programme within twelve months of appointment

Assessment of community engagement

Aim: End disincentives for community self help and determining of local priorities resulting from the current targets culture

By:-

- Abolishing national floor targets
- Improving evaluation of community engagement in local and central government performance management systems through mandatory community engagement indicators
- Undertaking assessment of central government departments' partnership working and cross-departmental collaboration

Equalities and social inclusion

Aim: Ensure regeneration and urban policy takes account of the needs of all groups when planning development and service provision

By:-

- Introducing a Single Equalities Act and extending a duty on public bodies to promote all forms of equality, not just race and disability
- Giving the proposed Commission for Equality and Human Rights the power to enforce the Human Rights Act and equalities legislation
- Requiring evidence of consideration of diversity and equalities issues in local and central government policy
- All policy papers and action plans including a statement to indicate how proposals will impact on the engagement of voluntary and community groups.

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Community Development

An increasing number of government initiatives rely heavily on a high degree of community involvement and social capital. There are significant social and economic returns on investment in community capacity building activity.

Funding

Aim: Provide secure funding to community groups to support community engagement and capacity building

By:-

- Central government providing funding for Community Empowerment Networks (including Community Chest and Community Learning Chest) throughout England
- Amending Regional Development Agencies' statutory functions to include social regeneration and strengthening the links between economic and social development

Relationship with Government

Aim: Ensure government departments are properly considering the impact on the community sector in policy development and implementation

By:-

- Fully implementing the existing requirements on government departments to produce VCS strategies that set out how their policies relate to governmental commitments to regeneration and civil renewal
- Abolishing the national Compact, and in its place having enforceable standards by which government must comply in consulting and involving the VCS in policy making and delivery

Education and skills development

Aim: Support community learning to build social capital and enable community organisations to share knowledge and experience

By:-

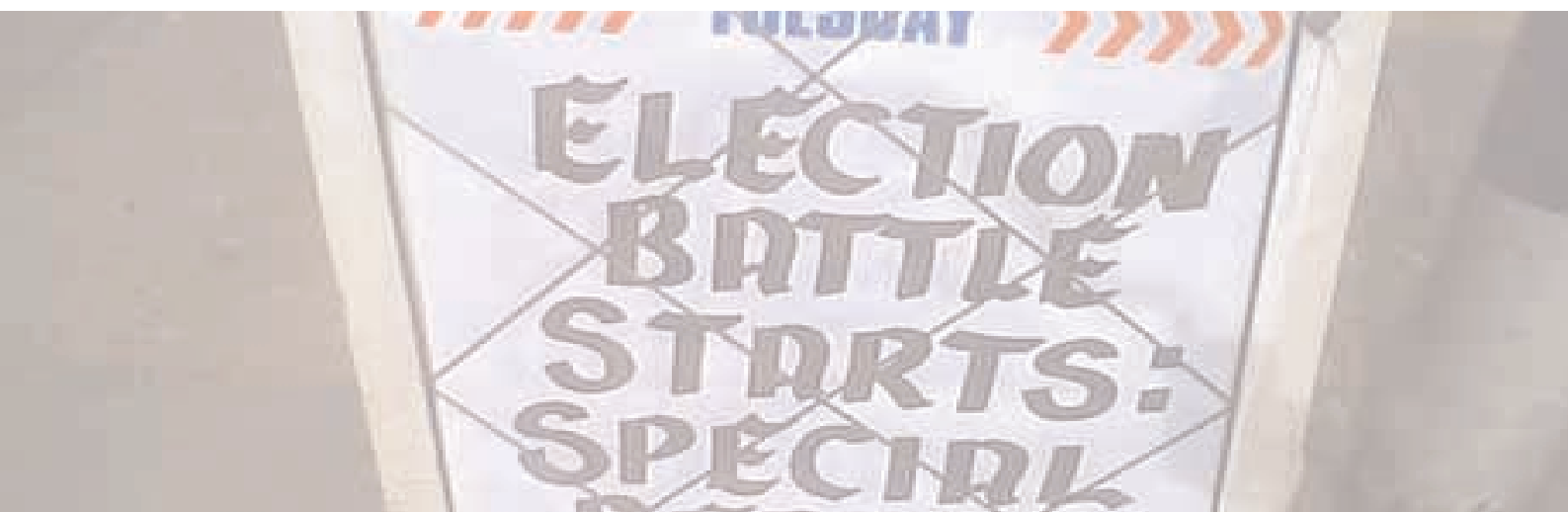
- Supporting more peer-learning and networking opportunities for community groups, including innovative and informal skills development
- Integrating local skills and workforce development into regeneration programmes to deliver employment and training for local people

Community capacity building

Aim: Ensure adequate government investment is provided to support community capacity building to build social capital and encourage community involvement

By:-

- Integrating the Home Office's Firm Foundation report principles to embed a community development approach into corporate and community strategies
- Establishing funding to implement the recommendations in the Firm Foundations report
- Halting the decline in local community centres by supporting community asset building and community control



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Community Ownership

Communities must be in charge of the design and delivery of urban regeneration. Unless policies adequately respond to local needs and aspirations we cannot expect lasting change to be delivered. Regeneration and community development are long-term goals and government's approach needs to fully recognise this. Sufficient time must be given for policy changes to be implemented and to allow progress to be made.

Language

Aim: Establish a cross-sectoral common language of regeneration and community development to enable effective collaboration working towards mutually beneficial goals

By:-

- Using terms like 'empowerment', 'community' and 'hard to reach groups' more carefully and specifically to avoid devaluing their meaning

Spatial Planning

Aim: Ensure that the new planning system effectively involves communities and ensure development is appropriate to local communities' needs and aspirations

By:-

- Producing robust guidance on how to involve communities in the development of local development frameworks and regional spatial strategies
- Ensuring that the planning inspectorate have sufficient skills and expertise to regulate and assess whether community engagement has been sufficient through training and support provision
- Integrating community involvement and a mixed development approach to spatial planning into the qualifications curriculum of planners and associated professions

Financial inclusion

Aim: Support wealth retention and tackle financial exclusion in deprived communities

By:-

- Redirecting 'dormant accounts' to support community asset development
- Enabling Community Asset Transfer from the public sector, to support community ownership and asset development
- Reviewing the Tax and VAT system to reduce the burden placed on the VCS
- Allow regeneration funding (such as New Deal for Communities) to be used in part to establish capital endowments for communities in need

Arts

Aim: Integrate arts and cultural activity into regeneration strategies as a means of establishing ownership of regeneration initiatives by local people

By:-

- Introducing a 'percent for art' clause in regeneration programmes to provide funding for community arts activity

Sustainable Development

Aim: To improve the quality of people's lives in urban communities now and in the future, through initiatives to address social and environmental inequalities

By:-

- Establishing funding for community activity that focuses on both social and environmental outcomes
- Introducing tougher enforceable targets for waste collection and recycling to provide communities with a more pleasant local environment
- Introducing a statutory duty to promote sustainable development on all local authorities

