



## Press Release: 'With a little help from our friends' – International Lessons for English Local Government

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Local government should have a key place at the national political table and have its role protected by law, according to a new report published today.

The independent report from the think-tank Localis, sponsored by the Local Government Association, argues for a series of vital reforms to the political process to ensure that local issues are placed at the heart of national politics.

The study compares the government of England with that of countries across the world, demonstrating the fundamental differences between the way local government is thought of in England compared to countries as diverse as South Africa and Denmark.

The Local Government Association, which represents councils in England, commissioned the report at a time of unprecedented demand on council services as a result of the tough economic climate. Despite this increased demand councils are finding, compared with authorities in other countries, that they are not being given the status or platform they deserve in national politics. This is in spite of the vital front-line services they provide to local people.

Some of the key recommendations in the report are:

- The role and freedom of local government must be enshrined in legislation, ensuring that councils are protected and respected.
- Local government should have a strong role in national politics, ensuring councils are represented at the top levels of government.
- The burden of inspection and performance management should be reduced allowing councils to focus entirely on the local matters that directly affect their residents.

Sir Jeremy Beecham, the Vice-Chairman of the LGA, said, "This report could not be timelier. While councils are doing everything that they can to help local people face the recession head on, they are still finding themselves burdened by an overly centralised political system. It is eye-opening to see how the system in England compares with our peers across the world, and disappointing that local government does not have the voice it deserves at the national table.

"We have long argued that councils should be given more freedom to adapt schemes depending on the needs of their local areas, and this report demonstrates how this would reap massive positive rewards for local people. In Denmark, for example, we see local government taking responsibility for health, administration of benefits and labour market policy. In a time when each local area is feeling the impact of the credit crunch in its own individual way councils need the power to allocate resources effectively and help those most in need without unnecessary intervention from the centre."

Roger Gough, the author of the research, said: "There is no localist utopia to be found but by learning lessons from other countries we can ensure that local government is placed at the heart of national politics."