



Response to 'Best Value: new draft statutory guidance'

Race on the Agenda (ROTA)

June 2011

About ROTA

ROTA is a social policy and research organisation that focuses on issues impacting on Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities. Our policy priorities are health, education and criminal justice. We are a membership organisation with over 20 years of experience. We host four networks – MiNet, the Transformative Justice Forum, the Female Voice in Violence Coalition and the Winning the Race Coalition, with a combined membership of over 3,500 organisations and individuals.

Consultation Response

ROTA is concerned about repealing the two main statutory duties, the Duty to Involve and the Duty to Prepare a Sustainable Community Strategy, covered in *Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities*. If the Big Society is about enabling local activists to emerge and be able to hold their public authorities to account, then repealing the above duties will be removing tools for them to use. The Duty to Involve would ensure that local authorities can be held to account about communicating and acting on the needs expressed by local communities. The Duty to Prepare a Sustainable Community Strategy would ensure local communities are aware of the priorities and able to challenge them if they feel their needs are not being met. Since it is likely that the Specific Duties of the Equality Act 2010 are to be less prescriptive, there need to be tools available that will ensure civil society has the ability to hold their public authorities to account when challenging decisions that impact on their communities.

The shift towards localism concerns many community and voluntary groups because public bodies will set priorities without the benchmarking provided by Local Area Indicators for measures of efficiency. This could lead to local community and voluntary groups being unable to challenge decisions as they will no longer be able to assess them against an agreed measure. The proposed changes to draft specific duties equalities legislation now remove the requirement to publish details on engagement in determining local authority priority policies. Both requirements have been critical to achieving the following:

- ensuring proper scrutiny and accountability of decision making processes
- ensuring that public resources are allocated on the basis of need
- ensuring communities are involved in public decision making (principles being currently touted under the Localism and Big Society in Coalition agenda)

ROTA welcomes the clarity of guidelines for making cuts to the community and voluntary sector. However, we would advise that many organisations providing services may need longer than 3 months in which to prepare alternative provision for the continuation of these services. ROTA is aware of local frontline organisations that have had to cease services even with six months notice, leaving many of the people they see without the vital support they need. ROTA believes that existing contracts should be honoured where possible and individual reviews undertaken when contracts must cease. It is imperative individual reviews assess the impact on services users and provide information on what other services are available to them.

Repealing Duty to Involve appears contradictory to the premise of localism. Many of the communities we represent are deemed 'hard to reach' and as such are often excluded from involvement in the planning and decision making processes that impact on their lives and future outcomes. Without the Duty to Involve, BAME communities may become increasingly excluded.

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