

Communities at the heart of local government

APSE today welcomed the combination of responsibilities that will fit into the new Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), replacing John Prescott's previous port folio which was within the now disestablished Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. The new Department for Communities and Local Government, (under the leadership of the Right Hon Ruth Kelly MP, (Bolton West), will keep some of the traditional responsibilities formerly within ODPM of Local Government, Housing, Planning and Sustainable Communities as well as taking on board elements of the Respect port folio from the Home Office and the Women and Equality Unit from the DTI.

APSE Chief Executive Paul O'Brien said **"The interesting move to place Equalities and Human Rights under Ruth Kelly's portfolio ought to help strengthen the implementation of equal pay within local government"** adding **"It would be obtuse for a Minister with responsibility for Equalities, and with a further role as Minister for Women, to preside over Local Government which is still struggling to meet full implementation of fair pay and grading systems unless she is prepared to give a strong steer on the issue of equal pay. We need urgent action to stymie the burgeoning fat cat lawyers that are breeding off pay inequality within local councils. Ms Kelly needs to come to the table with a set of comprehensive proposals to help local authorities tackle the pay gap"**.

Mr O'Brien went on to comment on the moves of some areas of the respect agenda from the Home Office into the new DCLG Adding **"We are pleased that some areas of the respect agenda have also been joined into the new Department for Communities and Local Government. Local authorities have been at the heart of tackling low level crime such as graffiti and fly tipping as well as tackling abandoned vehicles. All of which are significant quality of life issues for communities. The fact that communities appear to be at the fore of the new department recognises what local authorities have already been doing, which is putting communities at the heart of their services, and at the heart of tackling localised crime and anti-social behaviour that continues to blight too many of our communities"**.

Ruth Kelly will be supported in her role by a team which includes many former ODPM Ministers. The team includes Phil Woolas, Baroness Andrews, Yvette Cooper, Angela Smith and Meg Munn. APSE will continue to lobby the ministerial team for a comprehensive package of measures to assist local authorities in developing strategies to deal with the Equal Pay challenge. In addition APSE will continue to lobby the ministerial team on the importance of investing in in-house local government services to develop flexible service delivery to meet the aspirations of communities.

Ends

1. APSE is the Association for Public Service Excellence
2. APSE represents around 300 local authorities throughout England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland
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