

# A LITTLE RESPECT



The Government's Respect agenda should be about local authorities maintaining communities that citizens can be proud of, say **Mark Roden** and **Debbie Johns**.

The Respect agenda should not be seen as something that stands alone or as a narrow moral crusade. Instead, it should be viewed as part of a wider, and much more practical, attempt to put power back in the hands of ordinary people. Also, it is inextricably linked to a wider agenda that exists alongside Number 10's Respect Task Force, such as the Sustainable Communities and Liveability initiatives and the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act. The Respect agenda is not simply about rogue neighbours who bring fear to the local community, but also about creating an environment in which respect for others flourishes.

According to Tony Blair, the Respect agenda would contain a major push to 'change the culture of society', bearing in mind that recent MORI research has

proven that measures designed to foster greater mutual respect are popular. MORI polls also tell us that liveability issues (the issues that impact on people when they walk out of the door in the morning) are the ones that ordinary people really care about. This is how they form their opinions on whether public services have improved or not. Also, in terms of the wider Respect agenda, Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) are almost universally popular with the public as a way of dealing with persistent offenders – though care needs to be taken as to how they are applied.

#### A SHIFT IN EMPHASIS

For example, the Respect agenda places an emphasis on policy enforcement at neighbourhood level and on a common set of values

designed to achieve harmony and increased quality of life. This is particularly important amongst the poorest and most deprived. Local authorities play a central role in providing community leadership, and park wardens, highways officials and others are all an intrinsic part of enforcing respect within public spaces. Enforcement can only be guaranteed by the kind of continued, targeted and sustained investment that results in better community facilities (such as leisure facilities and parks). This includes the use of well-designed public education campaigns. In short, successfully delivered services help to engender respect, because they show that the local authority is showing consideration for local residents. Asking the same in return hardly

seems unfair so long as investment continues and the area is improving. In other words, respect is a two-way street.

#### TWO-WAY RESPECT

Respect is about undertaking a coordinated, instead of a fragmented, approach to service delivery.

A Local Environment Quality Survey of England found that fast food litter had increased by 450% since 2001. The London Borough of Camden, for example, has issued corporate ASBOs to those firms encouraging fly-posting. The same could well be extended to those fast food firms and local businesses that don't do enough to make sure the local high street is not full of rubbish dropped by their customers. This might mean additional investment in the area, such as establishing Business Improvement Districts to help keep the area clean. As community leaders, councils would be key to ensuring that Respect extends from rowdy individuals to local businesses and food chains.

Environment Secretary Margaret Beckett has challenged local authorities to utilise new powers included in the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act to help change the behaviour of the small minority who

It is worth stating that there are a whole host of ongoing projects that will help to deliver a mutual respect agenda by harnessing liveability projects to an expectation that good investment projects will be treated

## *Successfully delivered services help to engender respect*

continue to spoil the local environment through litter, graffiti and fly-tipping. Moreover, a new raft of powers will be announced on 6 April 2006 that will enable local authorities to issue fixed penalty notices for a number of new offences, as well as new powers to combat fly-posting and nuisance lighting. Local authorities have also played a key role in the National Community Safety Plan (2006-09) which, though not as widely reported or headline grabbing, is just as important and certainly complements the emphasis on respect.

with due consideration. Renewal and repair of community facilities costs money, which could impact on council tax levels – breaking the cycle of vandalism and neglect is crucial.

#### RESPECT FOR NOTTINGHAM

A key project currently ongoing is Respect for Nottingham, which has attempted to link the issues of antisocial behaviour and drugs. The aim of the strategy is to clean up the city's streets and to demonstrate that Nottingham is not a 'soft touch' for

those committed to criminal behaviour and to damaging the quality of life of local citizens. It has set objectives to ensure visible reductions in begging, street prostitution, street drug dealing and antisocial behaviour in local neighbourhoods. It also aims to create a notable improvement in the cleanliness and quality of the environment.

A Crime and Disorder Partnership was formed, which launched a high impact marketing campaign to illustrate the consequences of inaction and the benefits of improvement.

The strategy also sought to expand the warden service, not only to challenge other services, but also to address antisocial behaviour.

Another proactive strategy, and one that is also tough on the causes of antisocial behaviour and its cost to the local community, includes the implementation of projects such as the Clean Sweep Initiative in Southampton.

### SOUTHAMPTON'S CLEAN SWEEP

In 2004, a partnership between the neighbourhood wardens, the West Itchen Community Trust and local residents devised a stimulating project designed to get the residents of Newtown, Nicholson, Northam, Kingsland, Holyrood and St Mary's wards involved in the clean-up of their area. A competition called Clean Sweep invited residents to nominate their

they would receive on further improvement. This model is clearly one of mutual respect, in which clean areas are rewarded with funds and which helps the authority, the taxpayer and the community.

The key to respect is that it is seen as an obligation by both public services and ordinary people to help improve living conditions in local communities. Its meaning needs to be extended to the

## Better procurement and smarter spending will amount to little if councils still require to repair and renew facilities

street for the Best Kept Street award and offered a prize of £200 to spend on their community. This gave people a real incentive to have the best kept street, as well as the chance to spend the funds

environmental and liveability agendas for the drive to be more practical and, therefore, more likely to succeed. Better procurement and smarter spending will amount to little if councils still require to repair and renew facilities at a time when efficiencies are being demanded. Targeted campaigns are needed to communicate the value of public services, while investment is necessary to convince the sceptics that respect must be about more than ASBOs. People need areas worth respecting and local government will play a crucial part in making this happen.

**Debbie Johns** is Principal Adviser and **Mark Roden** is Research and Press Officer at the Association for Public Service Excellence

### In other words

#### **Cllr Bryony Rudkin, Chair of the Local Government Association's Safer Communities Board:**

*"Many aspects of the Government's action plan will allow councils and the police to help people whose lives are ruined by antisocial behaviour. At times, councils must be tough, and extending parenting orders and powers to close down problem premises will help."*

*"But tough measures are a last resort and risk isolating young people. Above all, young people must be prevented from getting involved in crime in the first place. The focus on intervention at the earliest opportunity and investment in sporting activities, volunteering programmes and a National Parenting Academy are all positive steps."*

*"Residents have a right to demand the full support of councils and the police. Giving local people more powers to do this will help deal with the problems that affect them most."*

#### **Minister for Communities David Miliband:**

*"The values of mutual responsibility and mutual respect have not changed, but they need to be nurtured in new ways. Communities are at the heart of the Respect Action Plan which outlines a demanding agenda for central and local government, calling for greater accountability in public services. Respect is about upholding and reinvigorating the civic values and shared activities that are the foundation of strong communities."*

*"Local authorities have an important community leadership role in taking forward the Respect work and they are the key to its delivery. Local Area Agreements joining up local strategic partners will help the delivery of this agenda. It is clearly important to ODPM as respect is integral to much of ODPM's work in creating sustainable communities through neighbourhood renewal, housing and cleaner, safer, greener initiatives."*

#### FURTHER INFORMATION...

Further information on the Respect agenda can be found at [www.odpm.gov.uk](http://www.odpm.gov.uk)

#### IN SUMMARY...

- Prime Minister Tony Blair has recently launched a Respect agenda, which involves a major push to 'change the culture of society'.
- The Respect agenda places an emphasis on policy enforcement at neighbourhood level and on a common set of values designed to achieve harmony and increased quality of life
- The Respect agenda should be about local authorities helping to maintain communities that citizens can respect

#### WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?

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