



# DIALOGUE E-zine

A video message by Prime Minister Gordon Brown is introduced by Nick Brown MP, Minister for the North East at The Summit 2010



## THE SUMMIT 2010 REPORT >

### THE SUMMIT 2010 FRONTPAGE >

#### 'CAN DO', REGION, 'CAN DO' PEOPLE >

We can achieve great things  
by working together

#### ROUND UP >

- Future for Local Government
- Balance of Power
- Managing Change and Meeting the Challenges Ahead
- Partnerships and Place
- Connecting Communities
- Towards a Low Carbon Economy
- 'Can do' Councils, 'Can do' Businesses, 'Can do' People, 'Can do' Region



# 'Can do', region, 'Can do' people – We can achieve great things by working together

The North East is a 'can do' region with a strong tradition of partnership working, which must continue. That was the resounding message from The Summit 2010: For North East Local Government, held at The Sage Gateshead on Friday 8 January.

The event, the first of its kind for North East local government, brought hundreds of councillors and senior local authority officers together with key partners from the public, community and business sectors to debate the future opportunities and challenges of significance to North East England.

The day highlighted the importance of working together with confidence. Many speakers, including the Prime Minister, paid tribute to the ability of North East councils to work together effectively through the Association, presenting a single and influential voice for local government in the region.

In a pre-recorded message to delegates, Gordon Brown said: "These have been tough times but, as this conference shows, the North East is a 'can do' region and your spirit, your resilience, your

creativity is already enabling you to benefit from, and in turn, to drive the economic recovery."

Regional Minister Nick Brown MP also spoke about effective partnership working saying: "The thing this region does best is to work co-operatively together. The Association of North East Councils and One North East have a really good working relationship, which will be crucial to getting us through the recession. Our responsibility is to provide local leadership on an enduring basis and confront the problems we face. Parochialism and procrastination won't get us anywhere. We can achieve great things by working together."

Shadow Local Government Planning Minister and Deputy Chairman of the Conservative Party Bob Neill MP said: "Local government has the opportunity to make a difference. But much more collaboration is needed, not just between local authorities, but also between the Police authorities, the health service and across the private sector as well."

Cllr Paul Watson, Chair of the Association, commented: "Leaders and Elected Mayors



Cllr Paul Watson, Chair, Association of North East Councils

of all 12 councils have given a strong commitment to work together to bring clear political leadership and collective support to those issues that are fundamentally important to the North East.

"Local government in the North East looks forward to working with all of its partners, across the political parties, within communities, the wider public sector, the business community and the

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voluntary and community sector to demonstrate that we are a 'can do' region with 'can do' people."

Chaired by Ben Page, Chief Executive of Ipsos MORI, the event attracted a number of high profile keynote speakers, including Dame Margaret Eaton, Chair of the Local Government Association; Dr Phyllis Starkey MP, Chair of the Select Committee for Communities and Local



Bob Neill MP, Shadow Local Government & Planning Minister and Deputy Chairman of the Conservative Party

Government; Tony Travers, Director of the Greater London Group, London School of Economics; and Dave Prentis, General Secretary of UNISON.

Discussions throughout the day focused on the key issues facing the North East. These ranged from the challenges and opportunities presented by the economic downturn and current political landscape, to devolution and localism, managing change, and the impact of improvement and efficiency.

Afternoon breakout sessions saw national and regional speakers talk about partnership working in local government, how councillors and other politicians can improve their engagement and connection with communities, and how the region can further develop itself, including in the new and renewable energy industries of the future.

Steve Cram MBE, Chancellor of Sunderland University closed the event with a rousing and inspiring speech on the pride he feels for the North East as a 'can do' region with 'can do' people.



Steve Cram MBE, Chancellor, University of Sunderland

The Summit 2010 was sponsored by NHS North East, Deloitte, One North East, the Homes and Communities Agency and the North East Improvement and Efficiency Partnership and organised by the Association of North East Councils.

For more information about The Summit 2010 and its outcomes please visit [www.northeastcouncils.gov.uk](http://www.northeastcouncils.gov.uk) and click on The Summit 2010 logo.

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# Round up – Key conference messages

The Summit 2010 was delivered through four main plenary sessions:

- Future for Local Government: Opportunities and Challenges
- Balance of Power: Central and Local Government
- Managing Change and Meeting the Challenges Ahead
- 'Can do' Councils, 'Can do' Businesses, 'Can do' People, 'Can do' Region.

There were also three afternoon Breakout Sessions, which ran simultaneously, focusing on the following areas:

- Partnerships and Place
- Connecting Communities
- Towards a Low Carbon Economy.

This report aims to highlight the key areas and outcomes presented and debated at The Summit 2010, including the important relationship between local authorities and the business community in the region.

## **Future for Local Government: Opportunities and Challenges**

This first session explored the challenges and opportunities for North East local government, at an important time in the political landscape and economic



Dame Margaret Eaton, Chairman,  
Local Government Association

climate. At the start of a New Year and new decade, those issues at the heart of local government's agenda were

outlined. Speakers gave their own perspectives and insights into challenges and opportunities.

The opportunities linked to the move to 12 strategic authorities for the North East, working with partners in the wider public sector, business and voluntary and community sector formed an important part of the discussion.

Public sector support for developing the conditions for business to grow remain vitally important and the ability to collaborate effectively across the 12 councils, in different ways for different purposes, will be an important tool in tackling the challenges ahead.

## **Balance of Power: Central and Local Government**

'Localism' is part of the vocabulary of local government and all of the main political parties. How this term translates into policy development, delivery of public services and support for communities is a key issue for local government. This session looked at the powers and freedoms that local government needs if it is to make a real

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Dr Phyllis Starkey MP, Chair, Select Committee for Communities and Local Government

difference to people's lives in localities across the North East.

Speakers addressed the issue of central – local balance of power and clarified the powers, freedoms and way forward essential for councils and councillors if they are to make a significant difference to people's lives.

The balance of power issue has been given greater prominence over the last

12 months or so, principally through the 'Balance of Power' Inquiry conducted by the Communities and Local Government Select Committee, to which the Association and its member authorities contributed evidence. The Committee's Report made a number of recommendations relevant to this debate, including: the call for a new constitutional settlement enshrining the principle of subsidiarity; Parliament and MPs setting themselves a high threshold before intervening in purely local affairs; and a Joint Committee of the Commons and Lords monitoring compliance with the settlement.

Last year the Conservative Party published a policy paper 'Control Shift – Returning Power to Local Communities' setting out a series of propositions including freeing local government from central control with a general power of competence and giving local people more power over local government, such as an ability to determine spending priorities.

If politicians are to make a real difference to local people's lives, powers need to be exercised at the lowest level possible.

### Managing Change and Meeting the Challenges Ahead

As the public sector faces ever increasing challenges in the current economic climate, local government is focusing its efforts on how it can work together to manage the changes ahead and continue to deliver efficiencies and improved services. This session explored the impact of the improvement and efficiency agenda on North East local government and demonstrated how the sector is equipping itself to manage the changes ahead.

Councils across the country have been working hard not only to maintain strong service delivery through the recession but also to do what they can to support people and businesses through the difficult times. In the North East, local government has maintained a focus on ensuring that it positions the region to benefit from the economic recovery, but as the public purse tightens, things will become more challenging.

Added to this, the requirements of citizens and communities are unlikely to diminish. With an ageing population, still significant levels of child and family

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poverty, persistent health inequalities and other challenges, local government in the North East must work together to manage the changes through strong leadership to drive forward its commitment to sustaining strong and prosperous communities.

**Breakout Session One:  
Partnerships and Place**

This breakout session explored how we can take forward a strong culture of partnership working in local government and the wider public sector to create the kind of place that citizens and communities want to live in.

Local authorities and regional partners need to work together and use the Total Place initiative to re-shape public services and deliver better value for money. It is about working smarter and joining up the resources we have for the benefit of the region.

We know that many of society's most difficult problems can only be dealt with by working together across public, private, voluntary and community sectors. Local authorities in the North

Pat Ritchie, Regional Director North East,  
Homes and Communities Agency



East have had a strong focus historically on partnership working, across service, geographical and institutional boundaries, to shape their localities and improve social, economic and environmental well-being for citizens and communities.

Part of the challenge for local government is ensuring that these partnerships feel meaningful and relevant to people's lives, and that the outcomes they deliver make a genuine difference.

The National Health Service is the biggest public service in the region and the biggest spender, making it a powerful economic force; one that is building on its strong partnership with local government.

The Homes and Communities Agency's long term focus includes developing comprehensive plans for places alongside local authorities and looking at how programmes fit together.

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### Breakout Session Two: Connecting Communities

The issues of public perception of politicians, the need for greater awareness and understanding of the role of the councillor, improving engagement and connection were considered in this breakout session.

It is crucial that we invest in member development and opportunities for supporting councillors in their varied roles, as well as initiatives aimed at encouraging a diverse range of people from a variety of backgrounds into politics.

Local government must also look to change the culture of political communications and examine what can be done to reach out to young people.

A key challenge for all of the main political parties, local government and governance institutions is around how we can ensure that politics and political processes engage broad constituencies of interest, reflect the diversity of society and engage in ways which inspire and reinvigorate democracy. We should address how we build and sustain trust



Andy Sawford, Chief Executive, Local Government Information Unit; Sir Jeremy Beecham, Vice Chair, Local Government Association (and Chair of the Connecting Communities breakout session); and Beccy Earnshaw, Director, SCHOOLS NorthEast.

with our communities and further enhance support for, and the standing of, councillors and their relationship with the public.

### Breakout Session Three: Towards a Low Carbon Economy

The transition to a low carbon economy is an important part of our vision for a sustainable future, not only to tackle the

impact of climate change, but as an integral part of our plan for economic recovery.

This session explored how we can build on our strengths and our achievements so far, in developing new and renewable energy industries to create jobs, growth and expertise in the 'green' industries of the future.

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Our universities are already involved in leading research and development in these areas and there is a real commitment from the Science and Industry Council, One North East, local government, the region's energy industries, business community and academic sector to develop work in partnership to maximise opportunities for the future.

The North East has been designated as a low carbon economic area for ultra low carbon vehicles and a consistent agenda and effective preparation has led to major investments. These include; Nissan electric cars at Sunderland; CPI as a major national industrial biotech plant on Teesside; printed electronics at NetPark Sedgefield; and wind power at NaREC in Blyth. Clipper Windpower Europe has also selected the North East as the manufacturing base for Europe and there is the possibility that two clean coal plants may come to the North East by 2015.

In order for us to successfully develop opportunities, we need to bring communities along with this vision. This is an area where local councils are



David Still CBE, Managing Director, Clipper Windpower Europe presents at the Towards a Low Carbon Economy breakout session. From left to right on the panel are Bob Coxon OBE, Chair, Science and Industry Council (panel chair); Dr Colin Herron, Manager for Manufacturing and Productivity, One North East; and Prof. Dermot Roddy, Director, Sir Joseph Swan Institute, Newcastle University.

uniquely and strongly placed to have influence and impact as part of their place shaping role and with their wide experience in engagement and involvement of people and communities.

#### 'Can do' Councils, 'Can do' Businesses, 'Can do' People, 'Can do' Region

The North East has shown resilience, vision and determination and demonstrated a strong track record in innovation and enterprise. These qualities and the region's ability to

diversify its economy have resulted in real improvements in quality of life for citizens and communities. This session looked at how we can work in partnership to build on our unique strengths and assets, as a 'can do' region and with 'can do' councils, businesses and people.

Local government, working with business, One North East and other partners, has a crucial role to play in identifying opportunities and finding

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solutions for helping the region into strong economic recovery. Working together on the new North East Strategy will set a pattern for sustainable growth for the next 20 years.

The Leaders and Elected Mayors of the North East's 12 strategic authorities have given a commitment to work together to address the challenges and opportunities for the North East, through strong, cohesive leadership and a consistent voice.

There is a strong and productive partnership between business and local authorities. We have given a commitment to be part of meeting challenges and believe that the strong and robust partnership between the public and private sectors, and a shared vision for the North East, enables and equips us uniquely to find an approach that is right for us and that can serve us well into the recovery and beyond.

There is real energy and ambition in the region – and we need to ensure that we nurture this and carry it forward.

John Cuthbert, Chair, Northern Business Forum; Margaret Fay CBE, Chairman, One North East; and Steve Cram MBE, Chancellor, University of Sunderland championed the region and its people, councils and businesses.



#### A message from the Prime Minister

In a pre-recorded message to North East local government, Prime Minister Gordon Brown talked about the collaborative working taking place in the region. Click [here](#) to view the message.

#### North East local government working together

All Leaders and Elected Mayors of North East councils featured in a DVD, shown at The Summit 2010, which highlights positive developments across the region's 12 local authorities. Click [here](#) to view the DVD.

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# Contact us

The Association of North East Councils is the representative body for local government in the North East. It encompasses the 12 local authorities in the North East in Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, Durham and the Tees Valley, on issues of concern to them and the communities they serve.

It is a cross-party organisation, with all of its Members democratically elected and accountable politicians.

**Chair:** Cllr Paul Watson

**Vice Chair:** Cllr Simon Henig

**Vice Chair:** Cllr Ken Lupton

**Chief Executive:** Melanie Laws

**Deputy Chief Executive:** Hilary Knox

## Association of North East Councils

Guildhall  
Quayside  
Newcastle upon Tyne  
NE1 3AF

Tel: 0845 076 0080

Fax: 0191 232 4558

email: [enquire@northeastcouncils.gov.uk](mailto:enquire@northeastcouncils.gov.uk)  
[www.northeastcouncils.gov.uk](http://www.northeastcouncils.gov.uk)

If you have any queries or comments about DIALOGUE-zine or would like to contribute to future e-zines, please contact:

Bethan Hughes, Communications  
Officer on 0191 261 3917 or e-mail  
[bethan.hughes@northeastcouncils.gov.uk](mailto:bethan.hughes@northeastcouncils.gov.uk)

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