

EMPLOYMENT

Employment Bill

The Employment Bill [Lords] had its Commons Second Reading on 14 July. Pat McFadden, Minister for Employment Relations and Postal Affairs, reiterated the provisions of Clause 14, (voluntary workers), which will enable voluntary organisations to reimburse expenses where they are legitimate. When Lorely Burt, Liberal Democrat Enterprise spokesman, asked for an explanation of why accommodation costs are excluded, he replied:

Accommodation can be directly provided, as part of a voluntary activity, but we were not keen to have what could be large amounts of rent changing hands. Large sums could be involved, and that could take us into a grey area in deciding what was expenses and what was not. So we have widened the definition, and accommodation can be directly provided. That is the judgment that we reached on the issue.

The Bill has been committed to a Public Bill Committee but no date has yet been set. Committee proceedings must end on or before 23 October.

[Source: House of Commons Votes and Proceedings – 14 July 2008]

Bill page: <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2007-08/employment.html>

FAITH & SOCIETY

Faiths in Action and the *Framework for Partnership*

The Government has announced an initiative entitled *Framework for Partnership*, which outlines new support and £7.5m worth of investment over three years to encourage and enable greater local activity bringing people from different religions and beliefs together. Its main features are as follows:

- an independent Regional Faith Forum in every English region, which will work with regional decision making bodies, including the Regional Development Agencies and Government Offices, to ensure that faith groups have a presence and effective say at the local and regional level; and
- access for community groups to funding under the Faiths in Action Fund, which aims to support local activities and will be open for applications to all types of organisations at national, regional or local level.

The Faiths in Action Fund, a £4m grants programme will be open to faith, inter faith, voluntary and community organisations and groups in England from 1 August 2008. Grants will be distributed in two rounds. Round one will issue grants of up to £12,000 to be spent over two years. It is hoped the grants will support a wide variety of local activities in a range of community settings. Administered by the Community Development Foundation (CDF) on behalf of Communities and Local Government, Faiths in Action aims to bring communities together, promoting positive relationships between people of different religions and beliefs. In addition to its two major initiatives, the Government will:

- produce a guidance leaflet for local communities which shows ways in which individuals and groups can work together with those with different faiths and beliefs and those with none;
- provide supportive guidance to local authorities on practical steps such as supporting shared community spaces; and
- work in partnership with the Inter Faith Network for the UK to organise an Inter-faith Week, encouraging faith communities across the country at all levels to raise awareness and celebrate inter faith work.

The framework is not intended to be a fixed structure of what Government expects to see happening. Rather, it is the product of consultation responses and best practice examples.

In its report *Our Shared Future*, the Commission on Integration and Cohesion made it clear that cohesion was about all parts of the community, not just race and faith issues, and that there was no “one size fits all” approach to cohesion. Local authorities needed to develop responses based on their own particular populations and circumstances. To support this, the DCLG has published a guidance document primarily aimed at local

authorities, entitled
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/cohesiondeliveryframework>,
which is designed to help local cohesion practitioners, particularly those who may have
the task of improving cohesion as part of a new local area agreement. It encourages
local authorities to map their communities, identify challenges and opportunities and
develop targeted actions in response. At the same time, DCLG published a summary of
the responses to its consultation document on inter-faith dialogue and social action,
[*Face to Face and Side by Side*](#).

[Source: *DCLG Press Release* – 21 July 2008]

Islam and social cohesion

Communities Secretary Hazel Blears has also announced a package of measures responding to calls from Muslim communities to support the promotion of citizenship and shared values and 'to stop Islamic theology being abused by those who seek to divide communities'. A new report, [*Preventing Violent Extremism: Next Steps for Communities*](#), outlines series of measures aimed at supporting increased take-up of citizenship teaching in mosque schools, strengthening theological understanding and a renewed focus on the importance of local council and community leadership.

The report includes plans to establish a new independent board of academic and theological experts. Cambridge University will be commissioned to establish a board of around 20 leading Muslim scholars and community representatives, which will examine issues relating to Islam in a modern context and how that fits with being a citizen in the UK. The membership of the board is intended to reflect the diversity of Islam and Muslim communities in the UK. Seminars will be held over the coming months to discuss a broad range of issues including citizenship, identity and gender.

Another issue is citizenship teaching in mosque schools. Building on work within Muslim communities, the Government has supported an independent educational organisation, the Schools Development and Support Agency, to work with Islamic scholars, educational experts and mosque school teachers to develop new citizenship materials and training packages for mosque schools, with the intention of demonstrating to young British Muslims that Islam is compatible with shared values and with being a British citizen. The new materials will be piloted in mosque schools in East London, West London, Leicester, Birmingham, Oldham/Rochdale, Bradford/Kirklees. Mosque teachers will be trained in using the new materials over the summer ready for use in October.

The report also proposes the establishment of a Local Delivery Advisory Group comprising council leaders, chief executives, education advisers, community cohesion advisers and housing association representatives.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families is jointly supporting the programme along with DCLG to develop citizenship teaching in mosque schools as well as wider

work to promote the role of education in building more cohesive and resilient communities.

[Source: DCLG News – 18 July 2008]

FUNDING

Grassroots Grants

The Cabinet Office and the OTS have announced that 63 local funders have been selected to distribute grants and set up endowments as part of the Government's £130m *Grassroots Grants* programme, of which 57 have accepted. Local funders will distribute grants of up to £5,000 to small community and voluntary groups in England – with the potential to reach out to new projects and communities that have not previously received funding.

Grassroots Grants, funded by the Office of the Third Sector and administered by the Community Development Foundation (CDF), is intended to provide grants to small third sector organisations and help local funders build endowment funds to provide a continuous source of small grant funding, by matching funds raised in the community. The endowments programme will enable local funders to generate additional donations on a matched basis, invest them and build their capacity to provide long-term funding for small community and voluntary organisations.

CDF is keen to give those that will be working in partnership more time and support to develop the structures, processes and relationships required to ensure they fully benefit from *Grassroots Grants*, as do the community and voluntary groups in their catchment areas.

[Source: *Cabinet Office News* – 21 July 2008]

DCLG White Paper

The Department for Communities and Local Government has published a White Paper on community development, [*Communities in control: real people, real power*](#). The White Paper (which is written in a rather *breathless* style, with **occasional outbreaks of random bold** type) asserts that Government wants to shift power, influence and responsibility away from existing centres of power into the hands of communities and individual citizens. The role of the State, it suggests, should be to set national priorities and minimum standards, while providing support and a fair distribution of resources. In particular:

The third sector – through charities, voluntary organisations and social enterprises – has much to offer from its traditions of purposeful altruism and selfless volunteering.

The White Paper addresses what the Government regards as seven key issues: being active in the community, access to information, having an influence, 'challenge', redress, standing for office, and ownership and control, under various heads:

It is not entirely clear what might be in this for faith-communities, but the following might be of interest:

- *New rights for the public to demand action from their council:* Councils will be subject to a new duty to respond to petitions. Petitions will enable local people to force an issue on to a council's agenda. With enough signatures that issue would need to be discussed by the full council committee and could be subject to a vote.
- *Increasing accountability:* Chairs and Chief Executives of local public bodies such as Councils will face regular public hearings as part of plans to increase accountability. More visible 'local question times' will give the public a chance to question officials about how they are improving public services and demand better results if they believe local services are falling short of expectations. It will also give CEOs an opportunity to explain the trade-offs involved in decision making.
- *Getting redress:* DCLG proposes to establish a review on redress for citizens when council services go wrong, to report in 2009.
- *The 'community kitty':* The White Paper proposes that communities should have a small pot of money that local people can decide for themselves how to spend – for example, on more community wardens or better street lighting if that is what they want.
- *Communitybuilders:* The Government will put £70m into a Communitybuilders Fund, to help community groups acquire buildings, take a role in running local services, and become more self-sustainable financially.

[Source: *DCLG News* – 9 July 2008]

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/886045.pdf>

Licensing Act 2003

The House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee has announced a new inquiry into the effects of the Licensing Act 2003. The Committee seeks views on:

- whether there has been any change in levels of public nuisance, numbers of night-time offences or perceptions of public safety since the Act came into force;
- the impact of the Act on the performance of live music;
- the financial impact of the Act on sporting and social clubs;
- whether the Act has led, or looks likely to lead, to a reduction in bureaucracy for those applying for licences under the new regime and for those administering it; and
- whether the anticipated financial savings for relevant industries will be realised.

The Committee will also examine other areas of interest that are raised during the course of its inquiry.

Written submissions are invited from interested parties by **Tuesday 30 September 2008**. The Committee's strong preference is for submissions in Word or rich text format (not as a PDF) by e-mail to cmscom@parliament.uk (although letters will also be accepted). Submissions by post should be sent to Rowena Macdonald, Secretary of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, House of Commons, 7 Millbank, London SW1P 3JA. Submissions should include a contact name, postal address and telephone number in the body of the e-mail or in the letter.

[Source: *Culture, Media and Sport Committee Press Release* – 18 July 2008]

WATER

Recess adjournment debate

During the recess adjournment debate on 22 July, Mike Hall (Weaver Vale) (Lab) raised a number of constituency issues, including water charges for churches:

United Utilities has also decided to change the way in which it levies water charges on churches. Such charges are now based not on rateable value, but on the actual area covered by the church, including car parks and open spaces. Churches obtain their income from parishioners, and any money that United Utilities takes off them in increased charges for water will come out of the money that they spend on their communities, their churches, their parishioners and their work. I have pressed United Utilities to say whether it will maintain the 90 per cent charitable discount for churches and places of worship, but it has not answered that question, which I have asked three times. Incidentally, I have also asked the Minister with responsibility for that matter that question, but he has not answered it, too. I need answers to all those questions from United Utilities. [cc 703–704]

To which the Deputy Leader of the House, Helen Goodman, replied:

My hon. Friend the Member for Weaver Vale (Mr. Hall) ... talked also about the unfair pricing of utilities, particularly with regard to churches. My understanding is that the Secretary of State put out guidance on this in 2000 and churches are supposed to benefit from lower charges. [c 749]

If so, there is little sign of such benefits.

[Source: HC Deb (2007–08) 22 July 2008]