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# PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION and GOVERNMENT

## Introduction

PA001 We live in a state where over centuries of struggle some democratic rights and institutions have gradually been grafted on to a feudal monarchy. In that feudal monarchy all power flowed downward from the monarch, and the people were subjects and not citizens. Gradually some of that power has been delegated to bodies like Parliament, or to local authorities, and citizens have acquired some rights. However our constitution still has many of the elements of its feudal past, including some remnants of the royal prerogative. We believe that the basic principle of Government should be the reverse of this, that is that power flows upwards from the people, and from their most local levels of Government to the higher levels. Certain principles follow from this:

## Principles

PA100 All decision-making and action throughout all levels of government, including international government, shall be governed by the principle of subsidiarity: namely that nothing should be done centrally if it can be done equally well, or better, locally.

PA101 A further principle is that any democratic and accountable authority may judge for itself which functions carried out at a higher level it can do equally well, or better, provided that the devolution of such functions does

not threaten the sustainability of the wider area. Coupled with the principle of subsidiarity, this establishes the need for a structure that responds positively to demands for decentralisation from below, and that ensures that this proceeds smoothly and does not disempower other communities.

PA102 The highest form of democracy is direct participation. This is best achieved through the decentralisation of society, so that decisions can be made through face to face discussion. All the major political decisions which affect our lives should ideally be made with our active participation, which requires open and informed debate rather than simply voting without discussion. This requires that all economic and social activity should be carried out on a human scale; that is, in a way that allows individuals and groups access to, and influence over, such decisions. Direct democracy will encourage cross-party cooperation and weaken the hold of ideologies and factions.

PA103 Such direct democratic participation requires citizens to be able to access the information they need in order to be able to take part in decision-making. Freedom of information, and openness of government and its procedures, are therefore integral principles in the creation of a more democratic and decentralised society.

PA104 Given the scale of human activity in the world today, and the indirect impact that much of this activity has on people living in different areas, it is clear that not all decisions can be made locally. The best form of democracy for large-scale activity is voting, in elections and referenda, in such a way that the outcome reflects the pattern of voting and no vote is wasted. Delegated authority and trust must be accompanied by full accountability.

PA105 A community cannot be self-determining unless it is to a large extent self-reliant. Self-reliance is the ability to satisfy needs without being excessively or unequally dependent upon anyone; self-sufficiency is one way to achieve self-reliance, but is by no means the only way.

PA106 Co-operation and working together in order to achieve a state of harmony with the planet and the life it supports must be fundamental to all policy decisions. Divisions, power relations, intolerance, prejudice, wide inequalities and failures in communication all weaken communities and preclude such co-operation. A Bill to enshrine rights and responsibilities must exist to help protect against this; positive action to build a tolerant, global awareness and to empower oppressed groups is also necessary.

PA107 Government must therefore exist at many levels, each based upon geographical

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areas within which a given set of functions can be carried out and with which the people themselves have some common bond. These areas will in many cases be bio-regionally based, on the geographical and ecological boundaries already existing.

PA108 The Green Party views citizenship as a set of rights and responsibilities based on residence in and commitment to a community or geographical area. Those rights include the right to basic material security and shelter, and participation in the democratic process. The Green Party believes that the age of majority (at which full criminal responsibility and the power to make contracts is acquired) should be reduced to 16, to clarify the age at which children become adults in the eyes of the law, with accompanying full citizenship rights and responsibilities.

PA109 The basis for a decentralised society and the establishment of a Bill of Rights must be laid out in a clear and accessible written constitution; but in the years before the adoption of such a constitution there is much work to be done in dismantling such a hierarchical and centralised state. While this can only succeed with the active participation of communities and local councils, and while various international bodies and institutions will heavily influence the process, the key to a smooth transition will lie in the way in which Parliament surrenders its tradition of national sovereignty.

PA110 The above principles all relate to issues of democracy and participation in the democratic processes. Important as these are,

it should not be forgotten that the primary purpose of government and administration is the provision of public services, including those institutions which maintain public order and national security.

PA111 Public services must always take account of the wider social impacts of their actions. All those involved in public service provision, be they elected representatives or public sector employees, should be working for the good of the community as a whole. They should be responsive to the needs, and respectful of the wishes, of their communities. In return, their efforts and commitment should be valued by the communities they serve.

PA112 Government actions must always be subject to the rule of law, which must be overseen by an independent judiciary.

## Policies Constitutional

PA200 A Constitutional Commission will be required to draft a written constitution, oversee and arbitrate the process of decentralisation, and take over the functions of the Boundary Commissions and the Electoral Commission. The Constitutional Commission will also be responsible for overseeing the appointment of an independent judiciary. The Commission must be accountable, representative, diverse, aware of practical requirements and grassroots concerns, and independent of Westminster. Therefore it will be formed at the earliest opportunity of elected members representing all levels of Government in all parts of the UK countries involved.

PA201 The Green Party will recommend to the Constitutional Commission that the structures laid out here for a gradual but complete decentralisation are written into the Constitution; that the Constitution is based on Green principles (see PA100-111); and that it fully guarantees political rights as well as wider human rights. (see RR)

PA202 In order for councils to be sufficiently legitimate and trustworthy to take on increased responsibility, large-scale electoral reform will be required, and immediate legislation for citizen's rights. (see PA250-308, RR301)

PA203 The Central Parliament needs to be prepared to surrender many of its traditional powers, and actively assist in the process of decentralisation. To this end, Parliament has a number of key roles to play - first, to devolve functions to more local bodies; second, to lift its hold over councils and enable them to realise their potential; and third, to work with the Constitutional Commission to meet demands from local Government to take on responsibility for resources and functions which are currently dealt with at too high a level by central Government and the private sector. (see PA100-101)

PA204 The Constitutional Commission will be responsible for keeping the boundaries and structures of local and regional government under review, taking account of the views of local authorities and residents. The aim should be to move towards structures which better reflect the ecology of the land and the character of local communities, and which enable better democratic decision-making and

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the effective provision of public services. Any significant proposed changes to such structures would be subject to a referendum of all residents affected.

## Direct Democracy and Political Rights

PA250 A Bill of political rights will be enacted at the earliest opportunity to prohibit oppressive actions by unrepresentative Governments and inaccessible bureaucracies.

PA251 There will be a compulsory register of elected representatives' and senior officers' pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests, which will be open to public inspection.

PA252 Legislation will be introduced to provide for referenda to be held on any government decision at the instance of a prescribed percentage of that body's electorate.

PA253 When a Bill of Rights has been enacted, a prescribed percentage of the citizens of any area shall be able to take a Citizens' Initiative, whereby they place a proposition on a ballot paper for popular vote. Should the proposition succeed the result will, subject to the law, be binding on the relevant government body.

PA254 Government at all levels should be accountable to electors between elections and accordingly necessary legislative steps will be taken to provide for a prescribed percentage of any representative's electors to be able to petition for the recall of any elected person, and rules will be

made for the conduct of such recall petitions.

PA255 It is accepted that such recall provisions as described in PA254 above may cause some difficulties under a proportional representation method of electing representatives and accordingly the Constitutional Commission will look further at this matter. Until, however, proportional representation exists for elections to all levels of government the Green Party will campaign for recall provisions under the current "First past the post" system.

## Electoral Reform

PA300 Elections for all levels of government should be by systems of election that provide for high proportionality, few wasted votes and good accountability, so that the political aspirations and views of each area are represented.

PA301 The right to vote and stand in elections will be based on residence rather than nationality. (see also RR706)

PA302 The voting age for all elections, and the age at which people may take seats at any level of Government, would be reduced to 16.

PA303 The Green Party supports Electoral Reform in all levels of Government, with different systems being appropriate for different levels of Government. Of the various electoral systems available, we would consider the Single Transferrable Vote and Additional Member Systems to be entirely acceptable, whilst First-Past-The-Post or Supplementary Vote Systems are not.

PA304 The most appropriate system for elections to the

Westminster Parliament is the Additional Member System (AMS). Electors would vote on two ballots: one for the party of their first choice and the other for their constituency MP. MPs would be elected from constituencies as at present, but each party's representation would be topped up on a regional basis by additional members to bring its number of seats up to its proportion of votes polled, provided that proportion was above a minimum qualifying level of 3% of votes polled. There would be a requirement that each party's list has to be elected by a system of 'one member one vote' of the party's membership.

PA305 The most appropriate system for elections to local Government is the Additional Member System (AMS). Electors would vote on two ballots: one for the party of their first choice and the other for their ward councillor(s). Councillors would be elected from wards as under first past the post, but each party's representation would be topped up on a council-wide basis to bring its number of seats up to its proportion of votes polled, provided that proportion was above a minimum qualifying level of 3% of votes polled. AMS would result in more proportional outcomes than STV and would enable smaller, more localised wards to be used. AMS could either work through electing the whole council at once or by electing half the council at each election to enable elections to take place more frequently. Final decisions on these matters should reflect local circumstances. The Constitutional Commission will oversee the establishment of AMS voting systems for local authorities across the country and work out

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the exact details. It will need to consider what proportion of members should be elected from the top-up list in order to achieve proportional outcomes.

PA306 All terms for elected representatives to all levels of Government shall be fixed in length, except when a seat is taken following a by-election. Each Parliament at Westminster should normally be for a fixed term of four years, but if the Government loses a vote of confidence in the House of Commons before the end of the fixed term then an earlier General Election should be held. Under the Green Party's longer term proposals for central Government reform (PA452-459), such votes of confidence would not be necessary unless Parliament were unable to elect a First Minister or members of the Coordinating Committee.

PA307 UK political parties will be funded by the State. Such political funding will be calculated and administered on a regional basis, and funds allocated in proportion to the number of votes cast in the region in the last round of proportional representation elections held across the entire region. Parties would need to exceed a threshold of 3% of the vote to become eligible for this funding.

PA308 The democratic process should be as open and inclusive as is practically possible, and should not seek to put unnecessary obstacles in place which may prevent individuals from seeking election. To this end, candidates' deposits will not be required at any election.

## Local Government Structure

PA350 The current organisation of local government, with some areas being covered by Unitary Authorities whilst others still operate two tiers of County and District/Borough Councils, has arisen for a number of historical and practical reasons. The Green Party believes that different areas may have different needs in terms of organisational structure, and that there is no reason why a situation in which different tiers operate in different parts of the country cannot work well. We are therefore opposed to any centralised imposition of uniform structures across the whole country.

PA351 In particular we oppose the drive by central government towards unitary councils and ever larger districts. The average population of British districts is already significantly larger than their equivalents in continental Europe, and this tendency serves to distance them from their people and make them seem less local. Some of the larger shire districts should consider whether or not partitioning them into two separate councils would enhance civic pride and local participation, without compromising their ability to deliver quality services (see PA204).

PA352 The county level of government can have an important place in strategic decisions too large for one district to deal with - particularly while there remains no popular will to introduce a regional tier of government. Popular support has been shown for maintaining what are largely county-scale police authorities. Many additional countywide bodies remain in the

metropolitan counties after the abolition of their councils. Some responsibilities of unelected bodies could also be devolved to counties (see PA415).

PA353 All Councils will be asked to complete a review of the pattern of Town and Parish councils in their area within two years; and the legislation on Parishes will be extended to cover all parts of Britain. Every effort should be made to ensure that the boundaries of Parishes reflect local peoples' wishes; the Constitutional Commission will arbitrate in disputes.

PA354 Town and Parish Councils will have the option of whether or not to pay Councillors a salary, depending on the responsibilities taken by the Council and the resulting workload of its Councillors.

PA355 Adjoining districts may co-operate to any level for the joint exercise of specific functions, provided such co-operation does not impact on the accountability of decision making. Similarly, parishes may co-operate to act on common concerns not applicable to the whole district. We support cooperation between authorities across national borders, where necessary or appropriate.

PA356 The Green Party believes that local authorities run by single party cabinets, or by directly elected mayors, are not in the best interests of local democracy. They take decision making powers away from councils as a whole and place them in the hands of a few individuals, leading to the disenfranchisement of those councillors who are not in the ruling party and the citizens they represent. We would

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therefore reintroduce the committee system across local government at all levels, which provides for direct member involvement in decision making.

## **The Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly and Northern Irish Assembly**

PA400 Provision will be made for reconsideration of the role of the Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly and the Northern Irish Assembly in accordance with the wishes of these people. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland will enjoy the degree of autonomy, perhaps involving full self-Government or independence, which the citizens of each, expressing their views through referenda, wish them to have. Citizens of regions in England will have a similar right. References above and below to regions will apply to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland so long as they choose to remain in the United Kingdom.

## **Regional Government in England**

PA410 Many Government functions are already organised on a regional basis through the Regional Government Offices (GRO), the Regional Development Agencies (RDA), the Regional Chambers (RCh) and numerous other regional QUANGOs. Public acceptance of these agencies, and their subsequent usefulness, varies from region to region, depending on how closely the regions correlate to natural and cultural areas which people identify themselves as living within. Any such region should be able to decide, via a referendum of the citizens living within it, to create

a directly elected regional assembly as an additional tier of government.

PA411 These regional assemblies would take over the powers of the GRO, RDA, the existing Regional Chamber and other existing QUANGOs, and adapt their existing bureaucracies to serve the new Assembly. Funding would, in the initial stages, come from diverting the existing block grant regional funding allocated by central Government.

PA412 The particular form and structure of these regional assemblies set up under PA410 will vary from region to region according to regional circumstances. They should be elected by a system of proportional representation. The appropriate form and structure will be determined by regional constitutional conventions drawn from all sectors of society, similar to the Scottish Constitutional Convention.

PA413 The powers of the regional assembly should be taken from those functions currently carried out by national and European Government, and should not take powers from local authorities, except where the local authorities within the region agree to pool some of their powers for strategic purposes.

PA414 In due course, the regional assemblies should be able to assume regional taxraising powers to replace the proportion of national taxation being allocated to regional block grant and other funding. They will also draw down more powers from national and European Government in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity. (see PA100)

PA415 In line with the Green Party's policy of allowing Citizen's Initiatives (PA253), a regional assembly or a regional government office could be abolished by a referendum of all all electorates covered by the body in question. In each case the powers would pass to individual county councils and/or unitary authorities.

PA416 Where regional assemblies, the Scottish Parliament, or the Welsh or Northern Irish Assembly have taken decision making powers from central government, so that citizens within those areas are no longer subject to central government decisions on particular issues, MPs from those areas should be excluded from voting on those issues in the House of Commons. Such a provision is consistent with the concept of subsidiarity.

## **The Structure of Central Government**

PA450 In a Green society, the UK central government will have less power than it currently has - with many of its functions being taken over by local authorities or the regions. The central Parliament's powers will be limited to those matters that have been delegated upwards to it, and which it in turn has not delegated onwards to the European Parliament.

PA451 Central Government currently revolves around the Prime Minister and the Cabinet, with the role of Parliament greatly diminished. The most important reform needed to redress this imbalance is the move to proportional representation. This will help to bring an end to the traditional

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dominance of two political parties in Britain. The central Parliament (House of Commons), elected under the AMS system (see PA305), will be far more representative of the diversity of opinion within the UK. There will be far less chance of an overall Parliamentary majority for one party, and, even without further reform, the resulting necessity for coalition governments would make governments and Prime Ministers much more accountable to Parliament.

PA452 In the longer-term, the Green Party would wish to introduce further reforms to increase the representative nature of central government. In order to create true cross-party working, and weaken the hold of political ideologies (see PA102), a different form of parliamentary decisionmaking would be required. Replacing the current system with one in which parties form coalitions in order to gain Parliamentary majorities, and therefore form a government, may still result in the disenfranchisement of large sections of the electorate, whilst minority partners in such coalitions may hold disproportionate influence.

PA452 Over the years the power of the Prime Minister in particular has greatly increased. Not only does the Prime Minister exercise the remaining elements of the royal prerogative in making vital decisions like war and peace and having effective control of the armed forces, but his or her powers of patronage - in particular choosing the members of the government - give the Prime Minister overwhelming control of both the overall direction and the minutiae of government. Reflecting the

powers of Prime Ministers, general elections have come to resemble presidential contests, with the characters of the leaders of the main political parties coming under more intense scrutiny than their policies.

PA453 We do not believe that it is either healthy or democratic to concentrate so much power in the hands of one person.! We believe too that power, executive as well as legislative, is more properly exercised by a democratically elected body than by a cabinet appointed by the prime minister (see PB443).

PA454 Accordingly, the Green Party would want the central Parliament itself to become the principal decision making body of central government. To do so the central Parliament would elect committees covering each of the major areas of government, and each committee would have its own convenor elected by Parliament, who would take the place of the Secretary of State in the current system of government. The committee, assisted by a department staffed by civil servants responsible to the committee as a whole, would be responsible for day to day decisions in its area of responsibility. Major decisions, and new legislation, would need to be ratified by Parliament as a whole.

PA455 A First Minister would also be elected by the central Parliament as a whole, who would be responsible for chairing a committee, the Coordination Committee, of all the convenors of parliamentary committees. This body would be responsible for coordinating the work of the different committees, and for dealing with matters that affect

them all, such as the allocation of public expenditure. The First Minister would act as Head of Government, in particular in dealings with other states. The central Parliament would also elect, as at present, an apolitical Speaker, who would act as Head of State (see PA600c).

PA456 All committee meetings, including those of the Coordination Committee, should be open to members of the public and media as observers, except when discussing issues which deal with confidential information or matters with security implications.

PA457. The First Minister and any of the convenors could be recalled by a no-confidence vote in the central Parliament at any time. There would be time limits as to how long any individual could hold any particular post, so as to diminish the corrosive effect of personal political ambition, a major fault of the present system.

PA458 In order to ensure that the business of Parliament better reflected the range of opinion in the country, time should be allocated fairly across the political groups for the submission of proposed Bills. Aside from the Parliamentary time which needs to be allocated to the essential functions of Government, the remaining time should be allocated to each political group in proportion to its representation within the central Parliamentary chamber.

PA459 We believe that such arrangements, combined with the introduction of proportional representation, would bring to an end the sterile two party jousting of current politics. Proposals would need to gain support on

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their own merit within the Parliamentary chamber in order to be approved, and the real policy debates will be open for all to hear. In particular, we would expect there to be much more genuine multi-party cooperation and working in the committees. Under such a system decisions are more likely to have the support of the overwhelming majority of the population than they are as at present when they are forced through by minority governments. In the longer run we would expect such arrangements to diminish the power of political parties as such, with individuals standing for election feeling freer to express their own views and to take an independent line once elected.

PA460 The House of Lords, as presently constituted, has no legitimate mandate because it is not elected. It should be abolished and replaced by a second chamber directly elected by proportional representation. In order to provide independence from the House of Commons, the electoral method should ideally be different for each chamber. With a Parliament elected by AMS, as above, the Green Party favours a second chamber elected by Single Transferrable Vote in multimember constituencies. Its function would be to scrutinise legislation devised by the central Parliament, and to propose amendments where it felt necessary. The final decisions would, however, rest with the central Parliament.

PA461 Members of the second chamber would be elected to serve for a period of ten years. In order to ensure that the chamber was able to make independent and objective assessments of proposed legislation, no member

of the second chamber should be allowed to sit on it for more than one term of office - therefore meaning that they don't feel bound to follow the wishes of their party leaders to preserve their careers. Accountability to the electorate would be maintained by the option of recall (see PA254). In order to maintain some continuity, elections would be held every five years - with half the chamber being selected at each election.

## Finance

PA500 In setting up or extending democratic practices, it is important to recognise that the finance available is not infinite. We need a system of government and administration which best fulfils the needs and aspirations of citizens and the challenges of the future, within the limits of the resources society is prepared to devote to it. A balance always needs to be struck. The majority of those resources will always be directed towards the provision of public services, rather than towards the maintenance of democratic procedures.

PA501 As the economy becomes more decentralised, more public expenditure decisions will be made at a local level. To facilitate accountability, and to ensure the gradual reduction in the scale of central spending, an independent commission should negotiate a rational allocation of taxation between different levels of Government, as well as any redistribution of wealth between different areas which is considered necessary (see EC550-551).

PA502 Discussion will be held with other countries within the European Community to

encourage concurrent devolution of those functions and powers over finance, more appropriately held at the regional level. (see EU227, 228)

PA503 Within a list agreed by the Constitutional Commission, councils will have discretion over which (if any) revenue raising powers they wish to use (see EC550). Levels of taxation will thus be set by the persons answerable to the electorate from whom such funding is to be raised, and for whom such services are to be provided. There will be no limits set on the revenue a council can raise to carry out its mandate.

## Monarchy and the Church

PA600 The Green Party believes that the hereditary principle should have no place in government. Therefore the Green Party advocates that:

- a) No person shall acquire the right to any office of government by inheritance.
- b) An hereditary peerage shall confer no right to sit in Parliament (see PA455).
- c) The monarchy shall cease to be an office of government. The legislative, executive and judicial roles of the monarch shall cease.
- d) Peers and members of the royal family shall have the same civil rights and fiscal obligations as other citizens. !
- e) A settlement of property held by the current royal family shall be made, to divide it between that required for the private life of current members of the family and that to be public property.

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PA601 There shall be a complete separation of church and state. Society shall not interfere with the individual's freedom of belief, but it may by law regulate conduct arising out of that belief. In a multicultural society, a privileged position for the Church of England is inappropriate.

PA602 The Church of England shall be disestablished. It shall become self-governing, and the government shall cease to have any powers and responsibilities peculiar to that church. No person shall hold office in the state, or be excluded from any such office, by virtue of their or their spouse's membership or non-membership of any religion or denomination of religion.

## The Civil Service

PA700 The functions of civil servants working within a ministry will be to support the Parliamentary subcommittee in its capacity as a coordinator of the national affairs which fall within the scope of the ministry, and enact decisions made by Parliament as directed by its subcommittees.

PA701 Senior Council / Government employees in a limited category of jobs shall not have the right to stand as candidates for the institutions in which they work. In all other respects they should enjoy full political rights. There will be a limited range of restrictions on the political and business activities of certain types of civil servants, members of the armed forces, the police service and people employed in certain public or private institutions.

## Provision of Watch-dog Facilities

PA800 The remit of the various commissioners for public administration will be strengthened. There will be a Commission for Citizen's Rights, which will be empowered to receive complaints of maladministration in any public body, to investigate them and to recommend redress. The Commission shall be empowered to accept complaints from any citizen or group of citizens. Where a complaint raises a significant question of law, the Commission shall be empowered to provide all assistance necessary to enable the complainant(s) to pursue the case at law.

PA801 The function of the Ombudsman will be elevated and enlarged so that it will comprise a major part of Governmental practice. The powers of the Ombudsman and the Commission for Local Administration will be strengthened as follows:

- i) The Ombudsman will be given power to investigate complaints which affect all or most of the citizens of a local Government area;
- ii) The Commission will be given power in appropriate cases to fund, or underwrite the costs of, legal test cases involving matters of importance concerning the actions of local Government.

PA802 Democratic participation requires the availability of independent information on which people can form an opinion. The Green Party would therefore introduce an independent body to audit national statistics, to avoid their manipulation by government departments.

## Identity, Privacy and Freedom of Information

PA850 The Green Party believes that there must be a balance between the need of government on behalf of the community to obtain and hold information to identify individual citizens and the civil rights of individuals, particularly that of privacy. The individual's civil rights should prevail, unless waived by specific agreement or overridden by a specific public interest stipulated by law as overriding privacy. Information on individual identity so obtained should be held confidential, unless that confidentiality is waived by specific agreement or overridden by a specific public interest stipulated by law as overriding confidentiality.

PA851 Such information must be obtained and held only by government servants subject to appropriate regulations on privacy and confidentiality; the task must not be given to commercial organisations. In accordance with the Green Party's policy on a 'Freedom of Information Act' (RR401), information acquired by government agencies and other organisations for specified purposes must not be given to other such organisations or used for other purposes.

PA852 The need for the state and other organisations to obtain information on individuals for specific purposes must not entitle them to access unrelated information at other times for any other purpose. This would undermine the civil liberties of individuals. It would enable those in charge of government and other organisations to obtain and use the information to attack the

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legitimate rights and activities of those opposed to them.

PA853 Information obtained and held by the state or other organisations must not be used to subvert and attack the legitimate rights and activities of those opposed to them.

PA854 The Green Party opposes the introduction of a general identity card, whether on a compulsory basis or on a "voluntary" basis tantamount to compulsion, and would seek to abolish such identity cards if introduced.

PA855 "Identity" in this context means a name by which a person may be known, and where necessary an address through which they can be contacted. For the purposes of the Electoral Roll, a location for the purposes of qualification may be required.

PA856 The Green Party believes that citizens should be entitled to access to information held by all levels of government and public authorities and by bodies acting on their behalf. Information should be available except where specifically restricted, and quickly and at reasonable cost. Restrictions shall be limited to those necessary to protect the privacy of individual citizens, national security, certain international relations, and information properly provided in confidence. Information on policy formulation, the conduct of public affairs, the environment and health and safety should be freely available. In addition, restrictions should only apply where the government can show they are required to prevent real harm to the public interest. Provision shall be made for an independent commission to test the latter

contention and require access if that contention is not sustained.

PA857 The circumstances in which access to council meetings and documents and files may be withheld from the public shall be clearly defined. In particular the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 will be tightened up in a number of ways, for example:

i) The creation by local authorities of 'working parties', 'panels' or other such bodies, which are not covered by the Act, will be ended. All such bodies will be defined as committees or subcommittees, to ensure that the Act applies to them;

ii) The use of valid exemptions to public access to documents pursuant to the 1985 Act, to restrict public access to matters not intended to be covered by those exemptions, will be ended; for instance the practice of excluding the public from decisions about grants given to organisations - as distinct from individuals where genuine personal privacy may apply;

iii) Steps will be taken to curtail decision-making in secret party group meetings as this practice makes the subsequent meetings of the council or its committees or sub-committees meaningless as the decisions ostensibly taken in public will in practice have been made beforehand. We would also wish to end the practice in which all members of a party are required to follow a whip imposed in secret, with penalties if they fail to do so.

## **Greening Local Government The Current Situation**

PA900 Local government exists in a permanent state of crisis, with neither the resources nor the sovereignty to implement effective Green policies.

PA901 Even within the current restraints, there are many things the Green Party will do to promote the decentralisation of power in our society and build a sense of real community within the areas in which we live.

## **The Work of Elected Green Councillors**

PA910 One solution is to go outside the conventions of political office to mobilise the resources of the community. A priority for Green Party councillors is therefore to act as people who can coordinate initiatives coming from below, tapping and encouraging the ideas and potential that are latent everywhere. (see EC512, 620s)

PA911 Parish and Community Councils can be set up where they do not already exist, encouraged to take more responsibilities and empowered by the District Council to take decisions and action. Similarly, there is the potential for the establishment of town/community meetings, empowered where appropriate to take decisions.

PA912 Access to the Councils' records and information should be made more open. Also, the creation of special community forums to oversee the work of particular departments and committees may increase involvement. Where elected, therefore, Green Councillors will try to persuade their local authorities to write such provisions into their own standing orders, particularly as regards

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PA857 (i) & (ii), thus committing the local authority to implement them immediately.

PA913 The council can facilitate and make itself accountable to referenda and citizen's initiatives. Where elected, Green councillors will urge their local authorities to themselves, in advance of any changes in the law, set up the machinery for citizen referenda and citizen initiative as described in PA252-253 above; to publicise this, to implement this and, subject to the existing law, to accept the results of such referenda and initiatives as binding. In such cases the prescribed number of signatures required on a citizen petition for either a referendum or an initiative shall be 20% of the electorate.

PA914 Individual Councillors can make themselves available for recall when petitioned to do so (see PA254). The Green Party recommends that all of its prospective councillors at future elections should voluntarily subject themselves to recall. Where the prescribed percentage of 40% of any councillor's electors petition for recall the party will (a) either organise a recall ballot of all the councillors' electors, (which will be supervised by independent persons of known integrity), and then encourage the councillors to comply with the result of any such ballot, or (b) urge its councillors to resign and fight a by-election.

PA915 Regular public meetings for neighbourhood and community councils and open agenda sections for all meetings give people a chance to make their voices heard.

PA916 Training of people within local authority professions with the help of trade unions and use of alternative technology can help increase environmental sensitivity, resource efficiency, and the selfreliance of the community.

PA917 Councils can carry out community audits and draw up alternative indicators of well-being or quality-of-life as a basis for the council's service provision and for public information.

PA918. To make councils more responsive and effective, it will be necessary to encourage cross-party cooperation, and weaken the hold of dogmatic ideologies and factions. The Green Party will not operate a system of whipping councillors into line, and Green Councillors will call upon other parties to do the same. (see PA857iii)