

AGENDA MANAGEMENT SHEET

Name of Committee Portfolio Holder (Customers, Workforce And Governance) Decision-Making Session

Date of Committee 18 September 2009

Report Title Strengthening Local Democracy - A consultation paper

Summary The Government issued a consultation paper in July 2009 which puts forward proposals to promote local democratic renewal by strengthening the capacity of local government to serve citizens. This forms part of the wider constitutional reform package and builds upon a number of the themes that were presented in Building Britain's Future. It explores whether local government has the powers it needs to meet today's challenges, as part of the Government's drive to renew Britain's democracy and build trust in the political system at all levels. It seeks views from interested parties on the proposals being made. The deadline for responses is 2 October 2009.

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Would the recommended decision be contrary to the Budget and Policy Framework? No.

Background papers Strengthening local democracy -Consultation July 2009 Department of Communities and Local Government can be found at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/localdemocracyconsultation>

CONSULTATION ALREADY UNDERTAKEN:-

Details to be specified

- Other Committees
- Local Member(s) N/A
- Other Elected Members **For information to**
Cllr Farnell, Cllr Roodhouse, Cllr Tandy, Cllr Appleton, Cllr Gittus, Cllr Moss, Cllr Davis

- Cabinet Member Councillor Heather Timms
- Chief Executive Jim Graham
- Legal Sarah Duxbury , Greta Needham,
- Finance
- Other Strategic Directors SDLT, Monica Fogarty
- District Councils
- Health Authority
- Police
- Other Bodies/Individuals Nick Darwen, Nicole North,

FINAL DECISION YES

SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS:

Details to be specified

- Further consideration by this Committee
- To Council
- To Cabinet
- To an O & S Committee
- To an Area Committee
- Further Consultation

Agenda No

Portfolio Holder (Customers, Workforce and Governance) Decision-Making Session - 18 September 2009.

Strengthening Local Democracy - A consultation paper

Report of the Strategic Director of Customers, Workforce and Governance

Recommendation

That the draft response is approved (with/without amendment) for submission to Department for Communities and Local Government

Introduction

1. The Government issued a consultation paper in July 2009 which puts forward proposals to promote local democratic renewal by strengthening the capacity of local government to serve citizens. This forms part of the wider constitutional reform package and builds upon a number of the themes that were presented in *Building Britain's Future*. It explores whether local government has the powers it needs to meet today's challenges, as part of the Government's drive to renew Britain's democracy and build trust in the political system at all levels. It seeks views from interested parties on the proposals being made. The deadline for responses is 2 October 2009. A major part of the government proposals centre around the 'offer' of more scrutiny which in our view is not what this should be about. Local government should be given the powers to lead not scrutinise. A draft response to the consultation questions is included as an Appendix. The Governments' views are set out in the following paragraphs.

2. *Building Britain's Future* set out how government wants to work with the people of this country to reform our democracy, overcome the recession and build the next generation of public services. It makes clear that this will involve a radical dispersal of power both to the citizen and to their local elected representatives.

3. The founding principle of local government is that citizens have the right to influence the decisions that affect their lives and their communities. Sometimes they may exercise this right through personalised services and sometimes by influencing local services – for example, by having a direct say over how their neighbourhood is policed, and sometimes it will be through lobbying their council. But a key way in which local citizens are able to exercise that right is their ability to elect a strong local council which can lead and shape their area.

4. There is a large and untapped pool of people who would like more say in what happens in their area. It is right that both central and local government do more to give them greater direct control over the decisions that affect their lives and their community and councils are doing much to help them explore the opportunities available to engage and participate. But we must also recognise that in today's time poor society, citizens only have limited time to give.

5. That is why the role of councillors and councils, with their unique democratic mandate is critical to making sure that local services are responsive to the needs of their local communities. Citizens have a right to have their voices heard, and to expect those delivering services to care what they think.

6. So councils must be fully equipped with the powers they need to act decisively and effectively on behalf of their citizens: the powers and ability to scrutinise, influence and shape other services. This is a much stronger role for local government, placing it firmly at the centre of decision making in their community.

7. There are other imperatives driving the need for stronger local government.

- First, **strengthening democracy**. Councils are unique among public service providers in being directly elected, but also in the range of services which they directly provide or indirectly secure, their role in leading and contributing to local partnerships, and their oversight of the well-being of their citizens and communities. That means they are best placed to provide local leadership and make sure that public services are being fairly and effectively delivered.

- Second, **promoting greater value for money**. Since 2004, councils have saved £4.5bn through efficiency measures – a significant achievement. The recent work by Sir Michael Bichard² shows that there is scope to go further: not simply achieving value for money in councils own spending, but by giving councils greater oversight of all the money being spent in their area. This will reduce overlap and duplication, making sure that all money is being spent effectively and efficiently: fostering innovation and improvement and driving up standards of service.

- Third, **promoting economic development**. The current economic situation has reinforced the crucial role that councils can play in supporting their communities. The best have taken active steps to mitigate the worst impacts of the downturn through, for example, offering debt services, supporting new apprenticeships, or looking to create new jobs through the Future Jobs Fund. Councils are uniquely positioned not just to work with other partners, but to lead them, in preparing for recovery and future growth.

- Fourth, **delivering personalised services**. As the drive continues to deliver personalised services and enforceable entitlements it will become ever more important to ensure that local services are delivered flexibly and in response to local needs.

8. Finally, as *Building Britain's Future* makes clear, there are major global and national challenges facing this country, including rising expectations of public services; the need to restore public trust in politics and democracy; the need to promote economic recovery; and the need to adapt to the threat of climate change.

Local government has a crucial part to play in addressing these challenges as their citizens' elected representative. We want citizens to have a real say in how these challenges are tackled, and on what happens in their communities³. This could include getting involved in local budgeting decisions, having a say in how local public services are run, taking part in petitions, or by taking over facilities for their community. Local government is the point at which citizens can get involved in the decisions which affect them and a way of reconnecting citizens to the public domain by empowering them to influence decisions that affect them.

9. As a result of recent decisions we have taken, councils have greater financial stability, greater powers and more responsibilities. The three year finance settlement offers councils much greater financial certainty and the prudential system for borrowing and investments removed the need for local authorities to get central government consent to borrow for capital purposes. They also have powers to promote the economic, social, and environmental wellbeing of their area. Councils also now have some powers of scrutiny to challenge other service providers and hold them to account. In short, they now have a much greater capacity to make a difference.

10. We now need to go further, making sure that local government has the powers it needs to respond to these emerging challenges and act decisively on behalf of their citizens to drive improvements in local public services.

11. We envision a powerful new role for local authorities where they:

- play a central role for citizens in delivering their entitlements, and have flexibility and autonomy in meeting local needs
- take on the responsibility for responding to emerging local challenges particularly climate change and housing
- take greater responsibility for scrutinising and oversight of public money spent on local service delivery in an area, in order to drive improvements in services and increase value for money.

12. The combination of the new measures proposed in this consultation, together with recent reforms, amounts to the biggest transfer of power to elected councillors for a generation. But it is not designed to strengthen councils for their own sake – rather to strengthen the rights of citizens through their elected representatives.

Scope of consultation

13. This consultation sets out a range of measures to promote democratic renewal and strengthen the power and responsibility of local government by:

- strengthening councils' ability to lead and coordinate services in their area. We propose to give councils more scope to scrutinise the spending and decisions of local service providers
- exploring whether there are barriers to using existing powers and whether there are other powers which councils should have
- ensuring councils have the powers and responsibilities they need to tackle climate change
- exploring how the powers and responsibilities of sub-regional structures should be matched by clear and accountable leadership

- exploring how to articulate, develop and support the relationship between central and local government so that our respective functions are clear and transparent to citizens.

14. Given the range and depth of recent debate – notably in the context of the Lyons Inquiry – we are not consulting on the local government finance system here. We keep this system constantly under review and will continue to introduce reforms where appropriate. For example, we have given councils a new power to raise a local business rate supplement. We have recently published a green paper on reform of the care and support system⁴, which could have important implications for local government. We have also stated in the Budget that we would explore with interested partners how to accelerate new development through innovative financing arrangements.

Local government at the centre of decision making

15. Local government already plays a crucial role in improving their citizens' lives and their areas' prospects. Councillors are recognised and respected as community leaders. Councils are directly responsible for a broad range of services: both directly delivering some, and commissioning organisations to deliver others. They also have an important role in shaping and monitoring services in their area, for example in relation to local environmental standards, and they are a major player in local strategic partnerships and other groupings which bring service providers together.

16. As such, councils are best placed to understand and respond to issue of local concern, and to bring all agencies – public, private, third sector – to tackle crosscutting issues which affect their residents and their community.

17. We propose to strengthen their capacity to do this: specifically by giving them greater powers to scrutinise other services and how they spend their money. When they go to vote, citizens should be electing someone who can act on their behalf in relation to every aspect of local public service spending in their area. Our aspiration is that councillors should become a local point of accountability: the place where citizens can go to question how public money is being spent, how decisions are being made and how services are being delivered. This will be particularly important as public services and local councils begin to introduce entitlements to public services as set out in *Building Britain's Future*.

18. This would complement, but not replace, the direct relationships individuals already have with a range of service providers. It would mean that citizens have an easy way to make sure their voice is heard in local decision-making. Elected councillors would have a clear remit to sort out general problems and failures, maximise the value for money of local services, and reduce the burden on the concerned resident who is trying to raise concerns.

19. Councils already have powers to coordinate and scrutinise some local services. But we need to make sure those powers are being properly used, and extend them much more widely. We do not propose to introduce new powers to benefit councils and councillors themselves: but to increase their capacity to act more decisively, over a broader range of local issues and services, in the interests of their residents. This is a natural extension of their existing leadership role.

20. In practice this should mean that:

- the council takes greater responsibility for co-ordinating service delivery, making sure that services are properly joined up and respond to local need
- councillors are able to scrutinise and hold other services to account: other service providers would need to explain and justify their policies and spending.

21. The importance of putting the customer first and providing joined-up, more effective and efficient services, lies behind the 'Total Place' initiative announced in Budget 2009. This is designed to analyse where public money is spent and how services are delivered across a whole area, in order to see how this can be improved. The idea is that public services work together, rather than individually, in the next phase of reform, delivering better services, and reducing costs.

22. This initiative will help public services reduce complexity, bureaucracy and duplication by bringing together the evidence on customer needs, and on what is being spent, by which agencies, and on what services, to address those needs. Each of the pilots will pick at least one particular theme, such as early years, ageing or offenders to explore in more detail how the money flows and how the delivery system can be made more effective and efficient. These pilots can help identify how all areas should develop in the future, and the role that the local authority should play in driving change.

Strong local government operating in the local interest

23. *Building Britain's Future* described how Government will be introducing entitlements for citizens. Wherever they live, citizens must have confidence that key public services will deliver a certain level of service. Local authorities will have greater autonomy to decide how to deliver those entitlements, in turn offering greater freedom to innovate.

24. So a future question being posed for consultation is whether councils have the right powers to address the challenges their areas face today and deliver improved and more efficient services for citizens; or whether there are areas in which they need greater control or influence.

25. We also ask whether there is further scope to reduce the burden of inspection on local authorities.

26. We also need to consider how best to support councils to reverse the decline in satisfaction shown by recent surveys⁵, despite increasing performance on key public services⁶. We ask whether granting further powers to local councils should depend on rising public confidence in the local council.

Local authorities tackling climate change

27. A number of councils are already at the forefront of action to tackle climate change. This consultation asks how we can help them to take the next natural step, and contribute to meeting national carbon emissions targets perhaps through developing their own local carbon budgets.

Sub-regional working

28. Partnership working is vital to tackle those problems which cross local authority boundaries – especially to promote economic growth across a wider area. Some of these partnerships formalised these relationships through Multi-Area Agreements (MAAs). The Government has also announced two city-region pilots. These will test how greater freedom and responsibilities for the partnerships in these areas can help them to deliver greater economic prosperity. This consultation document asks how the powers of city- and sub-regions could be further strengthened.

29. But we also need to ensure that greater powers and responsibilities are matched by clear, democratic and accountable leadership, so that citizens are aware of, and can influence, their decision-making.

Clear relationships with local government

30. All these developments raise the question of the nature of the relationship between central and local government. We ask whether and how we should articulate that relationship in order to make these respective roles and responsibilities clearer to citizens. We suggest a series of principles on which central-local relations should operate in the future.

31. We need to consider how this could work in practice: specifically, how to monitor how each of us is fulfilling our responsibilities without overstepping the boundary. This may include scrutiny from a joint Parliamentary select committee with a standing mandate to regularly review the state of central-local relations, as proposed by the Communities and Local Government Select Committee and/or an ombudsman style body. In time, more effective local scrutiny by councils, coupled with entitlements for citizens, could reduce the volume of central prescription and inspection by central Government.

DAVID CARTER
Strategic Director of
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04 August 2009

Your ref:
My ref: DGC/HJP/D12508
Your letter received:

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Dear Sir,

STRENGTHENING LOCAL DEMOCRACY CONSULTATION

I write on behalf of the Warwickshire County Council. Its response to the consultation is set out below.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AT THE CENTRE OF DECISION MAKING

1. Do you agree that we should extend scrutiny powers in relation to Local Area Agreement (LAA) partners to cover the range of their activities in an area, not just those limited to specific LAA targets?

The existing arrangements limit the ability of the lead council in each area unnecessarily. With the advent of the comprehensive area assessment, the lead council is judged on the overall performance of public services in its area. Therefore it should not be limited as to the issues it can seek information from other public service providers in the area. The current legislation is inadequate to meet this aspiration and the limitation to information related to an LAA target is fertile ground for disputes about where the boundaries lie. We welcome the proposal to extend the scrutiny powers to cover a wider range of LAA partner activities in an area. However, this is a poor substitute for a more effective set of proposals giving local authorities a real mandate to make executive decisions about local public spending.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



2. Do we need to make scrutiny powers more explicit in relation to local councils' role in scrutinising expenditure on delivery of local public services in an area? If so, what is the best way of achieving this?

The consultation paper is entirely silent on how these new duties are to be discharged in a two tier area and whether there is expected to be any significant distinction between the role of county councils and district/borough councils.

*The consultation paper talks in terms of local authorities having greater autonomy to **decide** how to deliver citizen's entitlements to key public services. This implies the ability to make a decision. The entitlements cover matters wider than those directly within the council's control. The Cumbria example clearly shows that only 11% of the total public expenditure in the area was under the control of the county council and that reduced to between 3-4% in relation to district councils. The Balance of Power Report was quite clear that the centralist attitudes of the Department of Health and Home Office in relation to local health and policing were replicated to a greater or lesser extent across many if not all other government departments and their agencies. These attitudes provide a powerful counter balance to any influence which can be exerted locally through wider scrutiny powers. Consequently that report recommended the devolution of greater local decision-making powers across a wider range of public policy areas.*

There is a level of confusion in the consultation paper over the role of scrutiny and the development of regimes that provide real accountability. Local accountability goes hand in hand with the control of fund raising. Local authorities should be given greater freedom to raise income locally and they should be able to deliver standards of service which reflects the ability and willingness of the local community to pay. Capping undermines the notion of local accountability. Because of capping local communities cannot be given the choice of paying more for a higher level, or wider range, of service.

Whilst the development of overview and scrutiny goes some way to providing oversight it does not provide any real democratic accountability. Scrutiny may at its best be influential but at heart it remains advisory. Public agencies can effectively walk away or simply pay lip service to any views expressed. Replacing scrutiny with a regulatory power located in localities whereby the public agencies have their joint activities subject to peer process with an ability to enforce activity shifts across the public bodies "from the perception of the end user" would enable more effective solutions at a local level.

The duty to co-operate needs to be strengthened into a duty to deliver outcomes in an integrated way. Other agency funding needs to be brought into the Area Based Grant vehicle to ensure monies can be moved around more imaginatively and encourage those who offer innovation.

The ability of local elected representatives to effect major change in health service spending at a local level is severely hampered. One option is to give local authorities responsibility for commissioning local public services to enable them to manage the complexity of relationships between services.

3. Do you agree that we should bring all or some of the local public services as set out in this chapter fully under the local authority scrutiny regime? Are there other bodies who would benefit from scrutiny from local government?

If an extension of the scrutiny role is the best we are going to get then all local public services should be brought within the local authority scrutiny regime.

4. How far do you agree that we should extend scrutiny powers to enable committees to require attendance by officers or board members of external organisations to give evidence at scrutiny hearings, similar to the powers already in existence for health and police?

The requirements should be consistent across all public sector service providers. There is little point extending the remit of scrutiny without giving associated powers to require information including attendance by officers or board members to give evidence at scrutiny hearings. We see no reason why the requirements for health bodies to respond within 28 days should not apply to others. There is no rationale for any different standard to apply and it would be consistent with the overall access to information regime.

5. What more could be done to ensure that councils adequately resource and support the local government scrutiny function to carry out its role to full effect?

Unless central government is proposing to introduce some ring-fenced resource it is difficult to see how it could be put in practice other than in the way suggested through a legislative duty. However, this is not the answer to more effective local decision making. It is pretending to do something whilst not giving local authorities any real power to make decisions affecting all local public services. Essentially local government will need to balance its priorities in deciding at a local level the extent of the resource. These proposals occur at a period of time when there is considerable pressure on all public authorities to make spending cuts and where difficult decisions need to be made to preserve frontline services.

However we do feel that this is yet another example of central government attempting to micro-manage local government and is an unwarranted interference in the internal organisation of local authorities.

6. How can council leaders ensure that scrutiny is a core function of how their organisations do business and have a full and proper role in scrutinising the full range of local public services?

See our comments on 5 above. The scrutiny role of councillors needs to be properly supported and funded. Councillors need to be empowered and enabled through their member development programmes to be able to carry out scrutiny effectively and that requires time and resources.

7. What more could be done to better connect and promote the important role of local government scrutiny to local communities, for example citizens as expert advisers to committees?

Councils are already making strides in engaging people in the design and delivery of services, engaging with user groups, community forums etc. Councils need to make better use of the information provided through these initiatives and other feedback systems, surveys etc. We need to engage more proactively to secure a contribution to a wider agenda. Local Involvement Networks also have the potential in the future to provide a network through which a wider cross-section of the public can be engaged. These are early days and LINKs need time to settle down and build robust local networks. Expert advisors may have a role to play but they can quickly become a part of the 'establishment' rather than representative of wider public views. What will essentially engage people with scrutiny is whether the topic under review has any interest for them. Developing specific additional networks, processes to encourage people to engage with Scrutiny is likely to be counter productive and expensive. We need to use the systems and arrangements already in place more intelligently not re-invent the wheel.[proposals to close services are usually the most immediate way to raise the profile of scrutiny (sic)]

STRONG LOCAL GOVERNMENT OPERATING IN THE LOCAL INTEREST

8. How best should any reduction in numbers of LAA targets ensure that services are responsive to the most important local needs and priorities as well as national entitlements?

If we are to reduce the number of LAA targets, the LAA should be more tightly focussed on indicators where improvement is most required (evidenced by residents' perceptions or other evidence of poor performance). With reference to paragraph 109, we should not underestimate the importance of the LAA as an agreement between local agencies (not just an agreement between the locality and government). If we do reduce the number of LAA targets, we should retain mechanisms for local partners to agree shared priorities and joint working arrangements for things that are unlikely to be in a reduced LAA (e.g. 'volunteering') - and for these mechanisms to have some teeth (e.g. duty to co-operate etc.)

9. Should councils have a power to engage in mutual insurance arrangements?

Yes but this should be generic and not specific to mutual insurance arrangements. See our comments below.

10. Are there other powers needed to cover engagement in further complex arrangements of a possibly speculative nature outside of existing powers?

Yes. The Council believes increased freedom and flexibility for local government is the best way to secure improved and cost effective local services. Local government should be given a general power of competence to allow innovative solutions to be found. This would reduce the regulatory/legislative burden which currently surrounds local government.

We believe that there should be a more generic power or at the very least an extension to the well-being power to facilitate other types of arrangement, not just the insurance scenario. The Courts seem to take a cautious interpretation of the well being powers where they think that the public sector is encroaching on what has traditionally been 'private sector turf' - whether S.2 as currently drafted could be amended or there could be supplemental legislation which is more enabling we need to get to a position where public sector bodies can work collaboratively to achieve costs savings or to achieve more direct well being benefits to the public.

Linked to this is a need to recognise that collaborative working is now the norm / the expectation and this very much links with the Total Place agenda. We therefore need powers which clearly enable us to establish shared services of all kinds whether through a new joint venture or otherwise and clear powers for shared services vehicles generally

We have come up against problems in terms of partnership working where the Councils have been able to find a statutory power to do something but our partners have not – e.g. there are still issues around the ability of health service bodies like Primary Care Trusts to be part of a company or joint venture. Similarly with Universities. If the Government is considering powers generally, it ought to line up the powers of all public sector bodies behind the current policy direction, not just focus on the powers of Councils. Again this is consistent with the Total Place agenda

We have also had problems in the past where we have come up against S.101 Local Government Act 1972 Act - in so far as we have wanted to delegate our decision making to a board (partnership board / management committee - not a separate legal entity in its own right) which takes decisions on a majority vote. In order to facilitate shared / partnership working and using the most appropriate vehicle for that purpose, a review of S.101 would be helpful.

Finally, in terms of the cases which spring to mind where we have experienced vires issues of one sort or another, these are;

- Learning and Development Academy - on setting up a new company to deliver the training based on S. 2 and whether it strays into the 'incidental to the incidental'. The initiative is however, entirely consistent with Total Place.*
- Powers to set up a company to hold proceeds of sale generated by sale of properties/ property rationalisation by a range of public sector bodies - linked to One Stop Shops, single point of access, customer service etc agenda. New vehicle would then to decide how the proceeds should be reinvested. Whilst we believe S.2 may apply to this proposal the uncertainty surrounding local government powers leaves local authorities nervous and a more generic enabling power would put that beyond doubt*
- Advertising / sponsorship - often comes up and we tend to rely on S.111 where nothing else is obvious. This is often linked to the Council generating an income stream to fund something which otherwise we wouldn't do.*
- Also linked to this is the power to do something and charge for it where the arrangement doesn't sit comfortably with S.2 or our existing charging powers (s. 95 LGA 2003)*

- *More generally, there is often a stumbling block in relation to procurement of services by public agencies from a company or joint venture which the agencies want to establish. Where a third party body is entirely owned by public agencies for public purposes the agencies should be able to commission services from it without a requirement for competitive procurement. A live example is the procurement of shared training and development services.*

11. Do you agree that greater powers should be premised on demonstration of local confidence? How should this be demonstrated? How can councils best reverse the decline in confidence?

No - greater powers should not be premised on local confidence - this will be difficult to assess and will cause difficulties in maintaining a consistent policy direction where public confidence fluctuates. Public confidence can also be significantly damaged by national issues and behaviours which have little to do with local councils and local democracy. Give Councils a general power of competence so they have the ability to implement change and innovate at a local level. Allow them to raise the funding to support the changes people want. What builds confidence is the ability to actually deliver.

12. Are there core issues that should have greater council control which councils believe they are currently prevented from undertaking? If so what are they and what is the case for councils to take on these roles?

See our comments on Questions 2 and 14 in particular.

13. Do you agree that there should be a review of the structure of local partnerships with a view to identifying unhelpful overlap and duplication? Are there particular issues on which such a review should focus?

Yes - this is likely to be proposed by our Partnerships Group working as part of the budget setting process and it is also likely to come out of the current LAA governance review. Corporately we are trying to promote this through the partnership toolkit tools and the partnerships database.

We should have greater local discretion as to what partnerships we need in order to best deliver our agreed functions and outcomes. Currently a number of partnerships appear to exist as a statutory requirement and it's not necessarily possible for us to rationalise our partnership structure as we might like.

This is a particular problem in two tier areas where there are overlapping structures at county and district level.

LOCAL AUTHORITIES TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE

14. How is the current national indicator system working to incentivise local authorities to take action on climate change? Should Government take new steps to enable local authorities to play a greater role in this agenda?

It is a useful starting point.

The wider NI186 is problematic. It assumes a consistent level of commitment by all the public sector. There is little evidence that organisations who don't see 'environment' as part of their 'core business' are likely to co-operate on the delivery of this.

The overarching issue is that there is no penalty for non delivery. This doesn't encourage 'good behaviour'. Nor does the fact that Government doesn't like us setting realistic targets within the resources we have available and replaces them with undeliverable ones. We have powers but no resources and this will get worse in the future as public sector finances contract.

15. Where can local authorities add most value in meeting climate change aims, and what should Government do to help them do so, giving consideration to the proposals set out in this chapter?

Local government can add value in areas where it has real responsibilities and the powers duties and resources to deliver - transport, waste, housing, planning policy. It can also add value through coordination, acting as a hub and sharing good practice.

16. How do we ensure that national policies reinforce local efforts – for example, around transport, renewable energy, and energy efficiency?

At the moment the policy and price signals coming from Government are inconsistent and sometimes contradictory. Transport policy is a classic example where the priority for investment remains the road network. Public transport, cycling, and walking struggle to attract sufficient levels of funding to enable 'step change'. Airport policy is another example. Exhortation simply won't do when a rail ticket Bristol - Newcastle is £160 return and an air flight less than £45 return. Why would anyone travel by rail? So policy and price signals need to be consistent across Government, otherwise consumers will never make the right choices. Without a consistent framework local efforts will at best be piecemeal and are almost always going to fail.

A statutory duty to enforce won't work at a local level. Local enforcement will be piecemeal and inconsistent in application. This needs to be national.

SUB-REGIONAL WORKING

17. Should the activity of sub-regional partnerships be required to be subject to scrutiny arrangements?

Yes, where appropriate.

18. Should councils' joint overview and scrutiny committees be able to require sub-regional bodies to provide them with information on the full range of their activities and to consider their recommendations on sub-regional matters?

Yes, providing this is exercised in a fair, balanced way.

19. Should the duty to respond to petitions be extended to sub-regional bodies?

Yes, where there is a decision making mechanism.

20. Do current and planned models for joint working give people a clear enough voice in decisions that are made sub-regionally?

This needs to be achieved through the appropriate level of elected Member engagement. We don't need another layer of representation.

21. How could we go further to make existing and planned city- and sub-regional structures more accountable, in addition to the suggestions in this document?

This should be through existing mechanisms not through another layer of bureaucracy.

22. Should we give more powers and responsibilities to city- and sub-regions? If so, what powers or responsibilities should be made available?

Yes, more regional control could be devolved to the sub-regions. This should be based on the delegation of central government forums to a local level not on sucking up the limited local powers. However, funding needs to follow.

23. Is there a need for direct democratic accountability at the sub-regional level? What would be the best means of achieving this, giving consideration to the options set out above?

No. The existing democratic processes need to have this flexibility to adapt to a sub-region's opportunities e.g. Sub Regional Leaders Board.

CLEAR RELATIONSHIPS WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT

24. Should central and local government's roles be more formally established?

We would prefer legislation that gave local authorities a general power of competence and established respective roles through the formal devolution of

powers. Anything else would be second best. In the absence of that or a formal Constitutional settlement the Central-Local Concordat should be reviewed as the basis for a framework.

25. What are your views on the draft principles set out above as away of achieving this ambition?

There should be further discussions between central and local government on a renewed Concordat. The draft principles appear somewhat unbalanced as a basis for a framework governing central-local relations. Only one of the draft principles refers directly to the role of central government. There is a rather complacent statement that central government complies already with these principles which is somewhat difficult to support given the comments in the Balance of Power report and the recent 'expenses' scandal .

26. Do you agree that an ombudsman-style arrangement and a joint select committee of both Houses of Parliament are the correct approaches to oversee and enforce these principles, if adopted?

The principles are far too broad for individual citizens to be able to raise concerns about their breach. This seems an incredibly bureaucratic and expensive way of monitoring this arrangement. It is not a good use of public money.

Yours faithfully,

David Carter
Strategic Director of Customers, Workforce and Governance