

ON-GOING PROGRAMME OF WORK

A.1 I have already published a series of research documents and some interim findings, but over the coming months the ongoing programme of research and analysis work will deliver further findings to inform my final conclusions. This will be key to informing my recommendations to Ministers in December 2006. The ongoing programme of work includes:

Nine case studies

A.2 I will be working closely with nine selected councils – Barnet, Bristol, Essex, Hartlepool, Nottingham, Sheffield, Shropshire, Southampton and Trafford over the next few months. These councils were chosen on the basis of a range of indicators to give a good spread of population size, demographics, CPA scores, political control and geographical location. All case studies will provide an in-depth picture of the issues councils are facing on the ground in covering three broad questions:

- what should local government do for local people?
- what is the most appropriate role for local government in delivering national and local priorities and services?
- how should local government's activities be paid for?

A.3 There are three specific aspects to each case study:

Place-shaping and the convenor role

A.4 Firstly, using desk based research (reviewing key policy documents and available research) and interviews (with councillors and officials) I will explore the strategic role of each council. This work will focus on the councils' role as a 'place-shaper' and convenor of services, particularly exploring what the barriers are to, and what is required to facilitate local government in undertaking these roles.

The case for devolution

A.5 Secondly, again through desk based research (reviewing key policy documents and available research) and interviews (with councillors, officials and key stakeholders) I will explore current and potential roles and responsibilities throughout the delivery chain focusing on six function areas – economic development, adult social services, waste, community policing, public health and children's services. I will also commission review papers of each of these function areas.

Public engagement

A.6 Finally, each area will have a bespoke public engagement event building on findings from the first two parts of the case studies. These events will explore the public's views on the future role, function and funding of local government. This work will be informed by an in-house literature review of research on 'what people want from local government', and submissions from a wide range of other councils on work they have carried out to engage their citizens.

Series of expert seminars

A.7 I plan to hold a series of six seminars – one for each of the six function areas covered by our case studies. These seminars will include a select number of experts in the field to explore in further detail the roles, responsibilities and funding through the delivery chain in each function area – in particular what central and local government should do and how this should be funded.

Survey of the general public

A.8 The third wave of my survey of the general public is underway. This survey will include questions on funding and finance – comparable to earlier waves one and two. In addition, I have also included some new questions to shed light on the public's views on a range of issues related to my extended remit where this information is not available from other research.

Economic development conference

A.9 I also plan to explore the role of local government in promoting national prosperity through hosting a conference on economic development. This national conference will look at the emerging role for local authorities and other players in promoting economic prosperity, addressing why place-shaping at the local level matters in the context of globalisation and international competition. The conference will include central, regional and local government as well as the private sector and international perspectives.

Other research and analysis

A.10 I plan to carry out further qualitative research with key stakeholder groups to inform my Inquiry. This may include focus groups or round table discussions with councillors, businesses and treasurers. I also will be undertaking further in-house analysis across my Inquiry remit – in particular focusing on key funding questions.

A.11 This research and analysis, in addition to work already carried out on my Inquiry since July 2004 will provide a strong evidence base upon which to base my recommendations to Ministers in December 2006.

Continued consultation and discussion

A.12 I would welcome further views on the issues covered in this report, which can be submitted through my website at www.lyonsinquiry.org, via e-mail at sirmichaellyons@lyonsinquiry.org or by post to:

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A.13 I will also be continuing to discuss these issues over the coming months with experts and academics, local authorities, and businesses and representative groups, as well as a range of other stakeholders.