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135/06

Sir Michael Lyons,
The Lyons Inquiry into Local Government,
Room 3/12,
1 Horse Guards Road,
London,
SW1A 2HQ

Our Ref MCa/EAE

Date 7th March, 2006

Dear Sir Michael,

Further to your letter dated the 20th January, 2006, the questions raised in your summary document have been discussed both at the Council's Group Leaders' meeting and the Executive Policy Board and the following response has been endorsed:

What is the strategic role of local government?

Burnley Borough Council would agree that the strategic role of local government does include "place-shaping," and we would see that included the main elements within Section 19 of your report. In order to carry out this role, local government needs to both provide and commission services, along with working in partnership with other public, private, community, voluntary and faith sector organisations to achieve the resulting vision. The Council does not feel that this role varies between different types of council. However, Burnley Borough Council strongly believes that in order to carry out this wider strategic role there is a need for unitary government across East Lancashire and, for Burnley, this would be based on a Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale footprint.

At present the current two-tier arrangements add further confusion to the public and undermine their confidence in local government. The Council would like to see more devolution to local government, allowing greater flexibility to meet local priorities.

The Council feels that further devolution in decision making could be achieved on a service-by-service basis and that, through this process, clear roles for local authorities should be identified. Where there is further devolution, the need for neighbourhood arrangements would be necessary.

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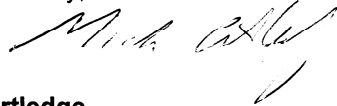
Which services should meet national standards, which should meet minimum standards and which should be down to local choice?

The Council has welcomed previous reductions in national Best Value Performance Indicators and, as a result, has further developed local indicators. However, looking at wider service areas, the adoption of national floor targets has been helpful in focusing minds and resources in addressing key services. The Council welcomes this approach and feels that Local Area Agreements are also an excellent tool for ensuring a mix of national targets and locally based targets, although again the Council feels that this would be more effective based on a unitary form of local government.

How can pressures on local services be managed more effectively?

In order to ensure that greater devolution of responsibility is successful, there is a need to ensure that appropriate resources are released to enable local government to successfully take on those new responsibilities. At present, the two-tier system does cause confusion about responsibility and, at times, duplication of effort can result. The Council has a good system of identifying what services are priorities and that is currently used to inform the budget process. However, we must emphasise the need for authorities to have the tools in terms of powers, resources, skills and real discretion in order to fulfil a strategic role. In particular there is a real need for local government to have a more independent source of finance if it is to succeed in its new role.

Yours sincerely,



Mick Cartledge
Acting Chief Executive

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