

Dear Sir Michael,

“THE LYONS INQUIRY INTO LOCAL GOVERNMENT”

Further to your consultation letter to local government Chief Executive Officers, I have been asked to respond on behalf of Fareham Borough Council Chief Executive, Alan Davies.

Mr Davies consulted Fareham Borough’s Local Strategic Partnership **networkfareham**, on 23 February 2006 who endorsed the responses to the questions posed – please refer to the Table below.

Networkfareham wished to add however, the importance for all local strategic partnerships to be provided with proper resource and authority in order to meet the aims and objectives set out in their community strategies. The relationship between local authorities and Local Strategic Partnerships is developing and needs to be considered within the Inquiry.

Yours sincerely,

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Note – weekdays normally available M,T,Th,F

The strategic role of local government

No.	Question	Response
1.	What is the strategic role of local government? Is my description sufficient, or are there more elements you would add?	Providing leadership in securing the best provision of local services from public, private and voluntary sector bodies and individuals.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • Which elements of this role should extend to services other than those for which local government is directly responsible, and how? 	None. Local government must get its own house in order first.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • How does the strategic role vary between different types of councils? 	County councils tend to focus more on regional issues (planning, waste disposal) and may be less sensitive or accessible to local needs and aspirations as against district councils.
2.	What tools do councils need to perform the strategic role more effectively?	Central support rather than prescription to aid strategic thinking and decision making.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • What are the existing barriers to councils performing this role effectively? 	Compartmentalised departments and/or authorities, preventing the effective tackling of complex problems.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • In what circumstances does it work well and less well? 	Focused single issue partnership working works well with effective leadership, e.g. PUSH.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • Are further improvements in performance, efficiency and accountability needed before local government can most effectively play this strategic role and be trusted to do so? 	No. There has been too much emphasis on these factors – often subverted to the political agenda of the government of the day – and not enough on assessing, planning for and meeting local needs.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • What are the key signs of success and failure? 	Levels of public satisfaction/dissatisfaction. Residents who are housed, in good health, well educated and in employment or well cared for.
3.	How important is the fact that local government is elected in relation to its ability and legitimacy to perform this role?	No taxation without representation is as relevant today as it ever was.

Devolution and decentralisation

No.	Question	Response
4.	<p>Which services (or parts of services) should meet national standards in all areas of the country? Which should meet minimum standards? Which should be entirely down to local choice?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • Are there aspects (such as standards setting, funding or choice of delivery mechanisms) of individual services which should be nationally controlled or locally controlled? • • Are there services where greater variation in standards would be acceptable if there was clearer accountability and consultation with local people? 	<p>National standard setting should be sufficient to avoid the lottery of service delivery by postcodes, e.g. school admissions, residential nursing care. Minimum standards should be set to meet basic rights / expectations, e.g. homelessness and the provision of temporary accommodation.</p> <p>There needs to be a disaggregation of individual services and/or separation of powers and for each part to be clearly identified as being delivered either nationally, regionally or locally but not a combination of some or all levels.</p> <p>There is a case for setting basic standards but for greater variation in the delivery mechanisms by which they may be achieved.</p>
5.	<p>How has the Government's approach to devolution and decentralisation affected your area and your local services?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • Which aspects of the current system are helpful and unhelpful, and why? • • Have changes based on central government priorities differed from those that might have been driven by local pressure and opinion? 	<p>By appearing to divert resources to more disadvantaged areas. The re-configuration of NHS services threatens to make local accountability for services more remote.</p> <p>Regional Offices can be more receptive to local needs than Whitehall. National campaigns are not devolved locally for maximum impact.</p> <p>Yes. The Council would have preferred to stick with the previous committee system but that was not an option.</p>

Managing pressures on local services

6.	<p>How can pressures on local services be managed more effectively?</p>	<p>By better service planning and more equitable means of raising and distributing resources for local services.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • What are the main types of pressures faced by local services and how are they currently managed? 	<p>Shortages of capital and revenue funding. Unmet expectations and dissatisfaction. Unrealistic targets. Fire-fighting obstructs service planning and delivery.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • Which are the most difficult to manage and why? 	<p>Demographic changes make the demand for services difficult to predict accurately and supply often lags behind. New centrally imposed local services with insufficient funding for local delivery, e.g. licensing, free bus travel.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • Would greater devolution of responsibility enable pressures to be managed more effectively? 	<p>Yes. It will spread the load, capture local knowledge and restore pride in the provision of local services.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • Does confusion about responsibility and duplication of effort contribute to pressures? 	<p>Yes. It definitely causes much waste of time, effort and resources, both financial and human resulting in poor decision making and low morale.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • Would greater public understanding of the actual costs of public services help to manage expectations and pressures? 	<p>Yes. Properly costed options for different levels of service result in people making informed choices.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • How can we ensure that the system provides the proper incentives and rewards for using resources efficiently? 	<p>By allowing locally raised capital and revenue to be spent locally, e.g. receipts from the sale of council houses, business rates and efficiency savings.</p>

Scope for a new agreement

7.	How could responsibility for local services be made clearer between local government, central government and other agencies?	By identifying key decision-making areas for each service and drawing them down to the lowest practicable level of responsibility across the various service delivery organisations.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• • What might this mean for the current performance management framework?	A complete overhaul with improved self-regulation and auditing across rather than between levels of government.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• • Would a more contractual approach for a small number of central priorities help to achieve this?	This would in itself require a regulatory framework.