
Chief Executive's Office

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Chief Executive:

Donna Hall

Sally Burlington
Lyons Inquiry into Local Government
Room 3/12
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Dear Sally

EVIDENCE FOR SUBMISSION TO THE LYONS INQUIRY INTO LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Following our conversation in January, I am now pleased to provide on behalf of the administration evidence from Chorley Borough Council, a district in Lancashire, for submission to the Lyons Inquiry.

We have used our Citizen's Panel to ascertain the views of local people towards local government as part of the evidence (see attached report).

At Chorley we strongly believe in high quality, localised public services and strong, dynamic community leadership through modern unitary councils. We are working closely with neighbouring councils to explore innovative service delivery – e.g. joint work with South Ribble and Preston on preparing the Local Development Framework, shared community safety planning, 'cluster' action-planning for the Local Area Agreement, etc.

It is clear from the attached Citizen's Panel Survey, completed in February 2006, that there is currently a great deal of confusion in the minds of local people about who currently delivers public services.

There is a clear and compelling argument for change in the structure and function of local government. The two-tier arrangement is duplicatory, costly and does not deliver locally accountable services.

I will now proceed to answer your questions in the order set out in your consultation paper.

1. What is the strategic role of local government?

It is critical that local councils are effective community leaders delivering the local community strategy and leading the LSP. Strategy cannot be divorced from delivery and we are not in favour of 'the County is strategic and District is delivery' ethos set out in the Criminal Justice Bill and the latest ODPM consultation paper. Strategy and delivery are inextricably linked. In Lancashire the County Council at 1.1 million population, including the urban core City of Preston as a district, is too large, remote and unaccountable to focus on a relevant community strategy for all aspects of Lancashire.

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2. What tools do Councils need to perform the strategic role more effectively?

Barriers to delivering the strategic role for councils include the following:

- *Confusion, duplication, gaps and lack of local decision-making in some two-tier areas.*
- *Lack of co-terminology of boundaries and non-alignment of re-structures, e.g. PCT, Police.*
- *Unitary councils are able to galvanise resources and capacity to effectively deliver strategy at a local level*

3. How important is the fact that local government is elected in relation to its ability and legitimacy to perform a strategic role?

It is critical. Democratically elected councils are able to articulate the views of local communities in a more meaningful way. The role of ward councillors in neighbourhoods as advocates and community champions is vital.

It is important that councillor's roles are strengthened and not re-invented through double-devolution. The size limit of councils is important in this respect. A unitary County at 1.1 million is far too large and diverse to be effective or for councillors to play meaningful role.

4. Which services should meet national standards in all areas of the country? Which should meet minimum standards? Which should be entirely down to local choices?

There should be core minimum national standards set linked to the Government's pledges, e.g. education attainment, health and social care, crime and disorder, environment, transport etc. However, these standards need to be locally refined and defined as measures and targets as part of the Local Area Agreement process. The LAA is critical in establishing a clear division of labour and agreed areas of co-operation between public agencies. However, it is vital that the LAA process is undertaken on a smaller area than a County – e.g. Lancashire – evidenced by our recent LAA process

5. How can pressures on local services be managed more effectively?

Greater devolution of responsibility to modern unitary councils at the local level will enable service pressures to be managed much more effectively.

In Chorley we have established a Local Public Service Board to bring together the public sector spend in the Borough – harnessing it to achieve more of an impact on the ground.

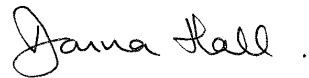
To conclude I would like to summarise Chorley's comments. In the future council's need:

- To be restructured to replace costly, duplicatory and ineffective two-tier structures with streamlined, modern, integrated unitary councils. The evidence in the attached survey supports this view.
- The role of community leadership is as important as service-provision.
- The Community Champion/advocacy role of councillors is critical. Government needs to operate through town halls not around them.

- The Local Area Agreement process enables a real opportunity to explore innovation, agree a clear division of labour between public agencies and improve people's lives in communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide evidence as part of this Inquiry.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anna Hall". The signature is written in a cursive style with a period at the end.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE