



Chief Executive Officer
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Sir Michael Lyons
Lyons Inquiry into Local Government
Room 3/12
1 Horse Guards Road
London SW1A 2HQ

6 June 2006

Your reference

Our reference LMcG/cb

Dear Sir Michael

Thank you for your letter of 8 May 2006, enclosing a copy of your latest thinking on the future role and function of local government.

As requested I am writing to respond on some of the points made in your letter and report, and to highlight some of the practical difficulties that Norwich City Council is facing within the current arrangements to make the sort of changes that you envisage would be beneficial to local communities.

You are of course already aware of our ambition to create a unitary council for the city of Norwich. This was covered in our response to your original enquiry consultation, and we recently also sent you a copy of our joint submission to the Minister for Communities and Local Government, in partnership with Oxford, Exeter and Ipswich. I do not therefore propose to go over this ground in detail again !

However, there are some specific points on which I would like to comment:

- Future challenges E2 – E5 – whilst acknowledging the point about the generally high degree of change, expectations and pressures, I would emphasise that this can be significantly higher in some localities, specifically cities such as Norwich which have such a significant influence on not only their own areas but their wider regions. Cities such as these therefore need appropriate powers to respond to both local people's needs, and to ensure that the city can continue to compete and further develop its economy.
- The case for local choice E6 – E13 – we would strongly support the case for local determination of some priorities and standards, whilst recognising the need for national standards and priorities. In Norwich we are used to being the recipient of key decisions made at a countywide level with little or no consultation, or even understanding of the needs or aspirations of local people. Residents of the city of Norwich have a double whammy – on the one hand the majority of spending and policy decisions are taken by the Norfolk CC cabinet members who represent wards outside the city boundary, whilst on the other the city built up area is covered by 3 different District Councils with different political make-ups and hence differing priorities, policies and

standards. Even the most determined and complex partnership arrangements fail to remove these basic consistency and accountability problems.

- Place shaping E17- 31 – we believe that this is the strongest factor which a local authority can bring to the successful growth and development of its area. But to be successful authorities need appropriate local focus, powers and status. The core statistics in our submission to the Minister neatly sum up both how vital the success of Norwich is to local people and the region, but also how different the needs and aspirations of Norwich are to the wider County. It is essential that a growing city has locally focussed government which can fully exploit local potential, and ensure a strong voice on regional, national and international stages.
- Roles and responsibilities E33 – E38 – we would agree with your suggestion of a more contractual approach, and accept that LAAs in theory provide a framework for this. However, once again in Norfolk the LAA is driven and funded at a countywide level, and although we have some input to this, we feel the particular needs of Norwich are not properly reflected. A city of this size and significance needs its own LAA and delivery arrangements
- Accountability and engagement E39 – E47 – there are effectively 4 councils (3 Districts and 1 County Council) running services in the Norwich built up area, each with different political leaderships and priorities. No wonder local people are confused or disinterested. The City Council is keen to develop improved neighbourhood arrangements to bring services closer to our people, and we will be looking to develop ideas as part of a bid for unitary status (should the forthcoming White Paper allow this)
- Capability and confidence E48 – E53 – Norwich City Council may be a District Council, but it has a clear vision and high ambition for the city. However, there can be no doubt that our capacity is thwarted by complexity and the inability to attract high quality staff into a District Council setting.

Finally, can I touch on a generic issue which is facing Norwich, but which is likely to be affecting other councils, particularly in city built-up areas. The current Norwich City Council boundary covers approx 125,000 people, but there are a further approx 70,000 people who live within the city but are covered by either Broadland District or South Norfolk District. The enclosed maps show the issue clearly. Inevitably this brings problems such as:

- Unclear accountability for local people
- Differing council policies and practices in parts of the city, and even in neighbouring streets which cross boundaries
- Residents of one council using the facilities of others (particularly non-residents coming into the city to use NCC facilities)

There are also a further approximate 150,000 people who live in the travel to work area who regularly use services and resources within the city area, putting major stress on our limited resources.

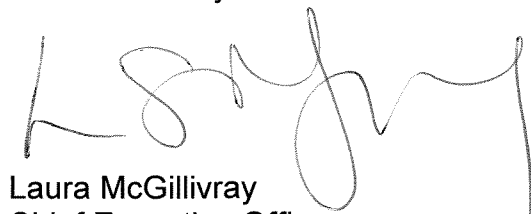
A unitary council on current Norwich City Council boundaries would clearly resolve many of the issues highlighted in your paper, and those previously raised by David Miliband. However, it would not address these issues above, and we would still need to establish the same complex network of partnerships that we have now in order to work around them. Norwich City Council is keen to pursue a solution that will provide the most benefit for all of the people of the city, and hence we are interested in developing alternative options including:

- Amending the city boundary to include all of the built-up area (ie approx 198,000 people, including parts of the current Broadland and South Norfolk Districts)
- Merging the City Council with either Broadland and/or South Norfolk Districts.

I should stress that neither of these options is yet being pursued formally, but we are beginning to test these ideas out with our neighbours, as part of our unitary case preparations. We are aware that either would require a separate Boundary Commission decision, but we would urge Ministers to not only promote more local decision-making and devolution of powers, but to also encourage more appropriate local government structures and boundaries where clear anomalies exist, and to allow for innovative boundary solutions to be developed as part of the process for extending devolution and powers back to local government.

I would be grateful for your views on this latter point, particularly as to whether this might feature as part of your recommendations and advice to Ministers in the future.

Yours sincerely



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