

## WORCESTERSHIRE COUNTY ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS

### RESPONSE TO THE LYONS INQUIRY DOCUMENT: “NATIONAL PROSPERITY, LOCAL CHOICE AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT”

1.1	<p>Worcestershire County Association of Local Councils has a membership of over 90% of the 151 parish and town councils in the county. Operating under the umbrella of the National Association of Local Councils, it represents parish and town councils, provides advice and guidance on all aspects of their operation, fosters innovation, seeks to promote and encourage best practice and acts as a nexus between local councils and other government bodies. Local CALCs are the only organisations which represent parish and town councils in this way.</p>
1.2	<p>Enhancement of the role of CALCs in promoting and monitoring good practice could provide an alternative to central government control if local councils were provided with central funding for a wider scope of services.</p>
1.3	<p>Parish and town councils can play a major role in achieving the new shape of local government which the Inquiry envisages. They are closest to their local communities and thus best able to understand their needs and aspirations. They raise and spend money within their local community, to which they are solely accountable. Existing legislation allows local authorities to engage in partnerships to provide services; local councils can assist in providing the services for which other tiers of local government are responsible. An example is the lengthsman scheme in Worcestershire, whereby local councils provide some of the services of the highway authority on behalf of the county council. The scheme is funded jointly by the county and local council, resulting in an enhanced service for the local community and savings for the county council.</p>
1.4	<p>Local councils are free of central government control on their spending and only the largest are subject to the central regime of monitoring. They are therefore able to consider and promote only the particular interests of the local community</p>
1.5	<p>In recent years, local communities have begun to expect more of parish and town councils, as they see the best of them providing enhanced local services, soundly and professionally administered. Experience has shown that where increased spending by local councils, in order to provide better services, has followed proper consultation and accurate understanding of local aspiration, it is not opposed.</p>
2.1	<p>Worcestershire CALC takes a leading role in promoting and monitoring professional standards of administration by local councils and in promoting partnership working, both within and between the tiers. It is funded by the subscriptions of member councils and by other fund raising. Its income base is inherently unstable, depending to an extent on the vagaries of member councils, not all of which may be comfortable with some of the harder messages the association must from time to time relay. Its ability to take an independent stance in relaying those messages is therefore potentially prejudiced.</p>

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2.2	There are, quite rightly, limits to the amount which councils are willing to pay for the service that Worcestershire CALC provides and therefore limits to its ability to develop those services. Its income, per head of electorate, is much less than that of the organisations which represent district and county councils, bodies which are better able to employ professional advisers than are local councils and therefore have less need of the sort of support which CALC provides.
2.3	A significant part of the service which CALC provides benefits all local councils, but is funded only by member councils, which effectively subsidise non members.
3.3	For these reasons, this association believes that an element, at least, of the funding of CALCs should be provided by a mandatory levy, collected by way of council tax and supplemented by central government. They would then be in a better position to support local councils not only in their existing role, but also in any future development of their functions and responsibilities.