

LYONS INQUIRY

Questions for stakeholders.

Overall.

- No. Local authorities should be able to carry out undertake interventions and secure greater funding for local economic development initiatives. Examples could include the use of Non – Domestic Rates locally to fund investment enquiry services, skills training or Business advice. The Local Authority Business Growth Incentive Scheme is wholly inadequate for its intended purpose as it operates retrospectively and does not support the establishment of local interventions to carry out economic development initiatives. In addition, local authorities are denied the opportunity to use some funding streams locally as they would wish. Some funding streams are utilised by national and regional bodies in ways that may not appropriate or acceptable to this authority.

There is also a lack of clarity from the Government relating to the funding arrangements for Local Area Agreements.

- These reports do not reflect sufficiently, local issues, priorities and characteristics. For example, the Barker Report signals an increased centralisation of decision making and would pose a threat to the viability of many town centres by scrapping the needs test for retail development. Whilst in larger cities such information may be of marginal significance, it could be critical to the economic future of smaller market towns.
- These reports tend to sidestep the overarching issue of government funding for these fundamental aspects of public services. In 2005/6 there was a 10% decline in adult and community learning in the UK. (L.S.C.) The Government's Sustainable Communities Programme is dogged by controversy over infrastructure funding and additional resources to tackle transport congestion are only identified by Eddington in the form of congestion charging. At the same time, public transport in London is now the most expensive in the world. Radical solutions which would require central government funding, such as high speed rail are rejected by Eddington.

Eddington Transport Study

Governance

- Local authorities are well placed and eminently capable of working in partnership to deliver transport outcomes. At a national level there is a lack of accountability for and ownership of schemes of major strategic significance, ie Trans European Networks, Trunk roads and rail network improvements. The Highways Agency is basically a failing organisation, lacking vision, incapable of working effectively with stakeholders and not providing the level of expertise required of it. At a local level, new institutions are not necessary.

- Local authorities need to continue to develop partnership working initiatives, including joint working arrangements and sharing services where appropriate.
- No.
- It may be necessary to allow local authorities to make their own arrangements- preferably in partnership- to improve public transport.
Local authorities should be able to implement schemes designed to address travel to work patterns and also social exclusion issues.

Convening

- Local Strategic Partnerships are best placed to coordinate the links between transport, economic development and quality of life issues.

Funding

- Central government funding should be increased to reflect the importance of the sustainable communities agenda and transport congestion. Priority should be given to areas of identified growth and particularly public transport. The government should fund directly schemes of national significance such as trunk road improvements and high speed rail.
- Road pricing, - with resources retained locally and car parking charges.
- Local authorities could use these increased resources to fund local infrastructure, public transport, cycleways etc.

Barker Review of Land Use Planning.

Governance

- The “new” planning system has failed to deliver what it promised. There should be a complete revision/overhaul of the current legislation and it should be streamlined to remove red tape, central control and inflexibility. Minor household development should be removed from the process altogether.
- Local delivery vehicles can be appropriate in growth areas and cross boundary situations. Local authorities can, generally, work together effectively.
- Local authorities should have a key role to play with regard to major issues in their areas. They are best placed to consult and work with local communities to consider the implications of such proposals.

Convening

- Local authorities can work together on housing, planning and transport through joint working arrangements, shared services, the Community Strategy/ LDF process and Local Strategic Partnerships.

Funding

- Front loading of infrastructure costs together with borrowing / PFI options would provide more confidence in the ability to accommodate growth. Government grant settlements are also uncertain contingences when considering growth options.
- A local power should be provided to introduce a charge on vacant brownfield land. A clearer definition of brownfield land would be required in such circumstances. Empty property relief (if any) should be left to the discretion of local authorities.

Leitch Review of Skills

Governance

- Increased powers for Local Strategic Partnerships would enable partnership working to be more effective and robust.

Convening

- Many of the links currently exist. i.e. Business Education Partnerships, Education providers, Jobcentre Plus, local business, Learning & Skills Councils etc. but these can be strengthened with increased accountability at a local level.
- Local Authorities can provide technology centres, innovation centres etc. and can coordinate programmes of work through individual initiatives, business support schemes and supporting other providers. A serious threat to funding comes nonetheless from restricted government support (such as courses outside the Skills for Life and National Qualifications Network schemes) and loss of European Social Fund support.
- L.A.'s can actively support schemes, play a representative and partnership role and act as "Community Champions".

Funding

- Additional resources will be required for training and skills providers, Especially from Government and not (contrary to the thrust of Leitch's Report) by increases in fees and reductions in course offers. Employers can, nonetheless, be expected to contribute resources.