

RESPONSE TO THE LYONS INQUIRY

Q1 *Do local authorities have the powers they need to effectively undertake their place-shaping role, particularly with regard to pursuing economic prosperity?*

A1 No. County Councils should have a wider range of powers in relation to strategic functions such as economic development, strategic planning and transport. The Strong and Prosperous Communities White Paper emphasises the importance of Sustainable Community Strategies and Local Area Agreements, and county councils lead roles in delivering. It makes more sense, therefore, to devolve powers from regional bodies to County “sub-regions”.

Q2 *How do the issues raised by the three reviews, and the implications of their recommendations, vary between different parts of the country and different kinds of place, for example between rural areas and major cities?*

A2 County Councils are increasingly taking on the role of convener of public services. They are best placed to develop solutions based on their particular circumstances. For example in Gloucestershire 87% of economically active residents work in the county. The net outflow of journey to work trips is 2.8%. 64% of journey to work trips and 60% of multi-purpose town trips are into and within the Central Severn Vale. The Central Severn Vale is dominated by the closely linked towns of Gloucester and Cheltenham, where 47% of the population live.

Q3. *Are there any other aspects of these reviews relevant to local authorities and to their place-shaping role that I have not identified? If so, what are they and what are their implications?*

A3 Gloucestershire is a good place to live and work, as evidenced by quality of life surveys. To continue in this vein requires high quality, joined-up public services. We, along with other counties and partners are facing major challenges in terms of demographic growth and change, and increasing customer expectations. This will require a better funding base and medium term financial stability.

Eddington Transport Study

Q4. Governance:

- *Can local authorities work effectively in partnership to deliver transport outcomes or are new/reformed institutions necessary?*
- *What are the key behaviours required of local authorities to work in such partnerships? Would new institutional or contractual arrangements be needed to support them?*
- *Do the issues not considered by Eddington – particularly the potential benefits of aligning transport with other policy powers – alter the best overall design for governance arrangements?*
- *How could local government make use of any new bus powers in line with its broader role in promoting economic development?*

Q5. Convening

• How can local authorities make the links between transport and other elements of economic development and quality of life most effectively at the local level?

Q6. Funding

• How could current funding arrangements best be reformed to support cost effective and appropriate spending and investment decisions at sub-national level?

• What transport funding sources are most appropriately managed by local bodies? What would be the most appropriate incentives to encourage the adoption of demand management options at a local level?

• Local authorities currently retain the revenues from local road pricing schemes. How might further developments in this area affect the use of those revenues?

A6 As administrative boundaries do not always coincide with transport networks and catchment areas we would like to see a simplified "single pot" for all Government funding relating to transport.

As yet we have no experience, beyond the view not to pursue local demand management (road pricing) as being unrealistic given Gloucestershire's geography (two main competing towns rather than a larger city dominating the economy) and the lack of public transport as an alternative to using the car. Road pricing has a "big city" feel to it at present and would not be seen as economically beneficial in this area.

Barker Review of Land Use Planning

Q7. Governance

• What specific measures are needed to ensure that local planning authorities have appropriate flexibility over issues of solely local impact? Are there particular implications from the Review's recommendations on the use of green belt land?

• What different approaches could be taken to enable strategic decisions to be taken at an appropriate spatial level? Can local authorities work effectively in partnership across wider areas to do this or are new/reformed institutions necessary?

• What role should local authorities have in relation to a future independent Planning Commission, and how should they best work with local communities on their concerns and potential benefits?

Q8. Convening

• How can local authorities link work on planning, housing and transport issues together most effectively?

Q9. Funding

• What would be the most effective and practical means of creating incentives for local authorities to support appropriate growth?

• How should the empty property relief in business rates be reformed? How should a charge on vacant and derelict brownfield land be introduced into the existing local land and property tax system? Would any local flexibility on such measures be desirable?

A7, 8 & 9

The government took away most of the county councils' planning powers, although they retain an advisory role. The Strong and Prosperous Communities White Paper has emphasised the need for strong county-wide LSPs, Sustainable County Strategies and the continuation of county-led Local Area Agreements.

We are expected to integrate these with Local Development Frameworks, which are produced on a district basis. Whilst we are confident we can work up appropriate solutions, it is unnecessarily complex and expensive for two tier areas. Any improvements to the funding regime to support brownfield site development would be welcome.

Leitch Review of Skills

Q10. Governance

• With their new strategic leadership role, how can local authorities relate most effectively to a reformed Learning and Skills Council on 14-19 education issues? What are the merits of the different options for managing the division of these responsibilities?

Q11. Convening

• What links need to be made between employment and skills provision, and other local services and responsibilities?
• What role should local authorities play in a new demand-led skills system?
• What role should local authorities play in the proposed Employment and Skills Boards, to ensure skills and employment issues are properly linked to wider work on economic prosperity and development?

Q12 Funding

• What implications for local authority funding do the Leitch recommendations or related proposals have?

A10, 11 and 12

The County Council already works closely with the Local Learning and Skills Council. The LSC is a key partner in our first Local Area Agreement, which will be signed off in March 2007. There is a renewed commitment in Gloucestershire, prompted by the LAA to work together to tackle issues such as learning and skills in a "joined-up way".

The County Council is a major employer in its own right.