

LYONS INQUIRY - QUESTIONS FOR STAKEHOLDERS

RESPONSE OF HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Overall

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

County Councils are able to act both strategically and locally & have a key role at sub-regional level. This should be enhanced by devolving powers for County Councils to act as County Regions with responsibility for strategic functions in line with those agreed for London. This would enable Counties to play a more effective place shaping role.

Local authorities have the general well-being power under the Local Government Act 2000, which potentially gives them power to undertake their place shaping role. This would be strengthened by Government placing a clear duty on them to exercise this in the best interests of the area & to acknowledge & emphasise it through their own actions. This means removing barriers such as

- Too much emphasis on national priorities & targets & not enough recognition for local circumstances & context
- Too many external funding streams dependant on different rules & criteria & subject to competitive bidding
- Too many imposed partnerships
- Role of regional & national agencies which are unelected & unaccountable & which run counter to principles of localism

Local authorities have the skills, experience & expertise to take the lead locally which is being demonstrated through LAAs.

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?

There are variations between different parts of the country & between urban & rural. The South East is the powerhouse of the economy, it makes a significant contribution to the Exchequer & has a high level of economic activity. It is in the national interest for the South East to have the right conditions for sustained & sustainable economic growth so the interrelationship between London & the South East needs to be recognised. In the South East, there are large variations between values of employment & housing land, with implications for planning policy & economic policy. Improvements in infrastructure may result in peripheral areas being left further behind, which can be the case both within & between areas. The development of skills & the engagement in labour markets is going to vary across the country & with the structure of local industries.

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?

It is important to relate the reviews to the achievements of the best local authorities which, by their 4 or 3 star status are already local leaders, have developed partnerships which bring together key partners to achieve locally determined priorities & which thereby demonstrate their ability to shape services & create sustainable communities. This will be supported & reinforced by the proposals in the White Paper & Bill.

Eddington Transport Study

Governance

Can local authorities work effectively in partnership to deliver transport outcomes or are new/reformed institutions necessary?

Local Authorities are best placed to understand transport issues, and to bring forward solutions, which are unlikely to be restricted to exclusively transport measures. The integration of land use, economic and transport planning and policy are key to the delivery of transport outcomes, but these must be based on a strategic level of operation, as transport cannot be dealt with at the very local level. The Solent Transport Partnership in South Hampshire is a good example of a sub regional inter-authority partnership, which also involves bus operators, the Highways Agency, rail representatives and groups representing freight hauliers and motorists. Proposals are currently being developed to define a delivery role for the Partnership in respect transport through the Sub Regional Spatial Strategy of the SE Plan.

What are the key behaviours required of local authorities to work in such partnerships?

Willingness to work together, to utilise resources for maximum effect and to share decision making in an inclusive and open way which retains democratic accountability, whilst delivering on required action. The Solent Partnership is currently evolving and is likely to become a formal Joint Committee of the three transport authorities (Hampshire County, Southampton and Portsmouth Cities).

Would new institutional or contractual arrangements be needed to support them?

Additional powers and devolution of regional powers and resources in appropriate cases would be very helpful in addressing sub regional issues (e.g. devolved allocations from the RFA or more powers to manage public transport). The ability to produce sub-regional LTPs may also be an issue worth exploring in such circumstances.

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?

Yes in respect of sub-regional planning and economic development matters. There is a clear case for a below regional but greater than local tier of strategic policy making and delivery. This may normally be a County level role, but there are circumstances where partnership with unitary authorities or between county areas is the best model for local circumstances. There is little consideration in the report of the potential for employers to adopt more flexible working policies which can offer transport benefits. Local authorities are well placed to encourage & promote best practice, & Hampshire has run a successful pilot to test this out.

How could local government make use of any new bus powers in line with its broader role in prompting economic development?

Access and transport considerations are often key constraints on economic development, as identified by Eddington. The ability to secure attractive and reliable public transport alternatives to the car is a key economic development issue in successful, but congested areas. Therefore the ability to manage the public transport system to deliver integration (e.g. rail and bus), appropriate quality and frequency of services, without the current dichotomy between commercial and subsidised services would be a very worthwhile goal. The Eddington suggestions are modest, but a start in the right direction.

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?

LAA's are well placed to bring together transport & other elements of economic development & quality of life.

Hampshire has had a business led partnership for some time, including a transport task group, which engages business through debate on the barriers & improvements needed to address transport infrastructure issues.

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?

The present LTP arrangements for expenditure on maintenance & integrated transport block allocations & monitoring work well & allow local authorities to plan over an appropriate period.

There is potential to make more use of Business Improvement Districts at a local level to encourage adoption of green travel measures. Government also needs to think more imaginatively by aligning 'softer' measures such as e-government, broadband support, flexible working, school times to tackle congestion with appropriate & relevant resources channelled through the local authority.

Barker Review of Land Use Planning

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?

Sub regional planning is the key to effective delivery of sustainable communities in areas where the Regional level is too remote and the local is not strategic enough to address issues such as economic development, infrastructure planning and delivery or transport.

Can local authorities work effectively in partnership across wider areas to do this or are new/reformed institutions necessary?

Local Authorities are best placed to understand sub regional issues and develop and implement policy accordingly.. The integration of land use, economic and transport planning and policy are key to the delivery of sustainable communities., The Partnership for Urban South Hampshire is a good example of a sub regional inter-authority partnership, which also involves GOSE, SEEDA and SEERA. The Partnership is currently working through the development of arrangements to aid its role as a delivery vehicle for the Sub Regional Spatial Strategy of the SE Plan. PUSH has also featured as an exemplar partnership in the recent White Paper.

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?

The Government took away most of the county councils planning powers, although in the final Act county councils were given an advisory role regionally when it was realized that such regional plans were unlikely to be produced satisfactorily without the help & support of counties. As indicated before, County Councils in the South East use the regional bodies where the Government has made them the mechanism for coordination, but work together on a range of issues & are capable of cooperating on their own initiative. Multi-area agreements could be used to ensure that other organisations, such as the Government & its agencies also committed themselves.

Convening

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

Local authorities can link housing, planning, transport & economic development issues together at a sub-regional level. The Partnership for Urban South Hampshire (PUSH) is a good example.

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?

Local authorities are working to develop sustainable communities. The localisation of business rates would provide an incentive for economic development & would facilitate a closer working relationship with the local business community. There would be greater accountability & a clear relationship with local services.

The suggestion of a review of the changes on derelict & vacant industrial land is welcomed. This has 2 detrimental effects in most of the South East:

- It allows developers to sit on property/land which they may regard as a long term investment & yet the property/land is seen as allocated by the planning system – which can lead to an overestimation of the true availability of employment land
- The relief allows time for the developer to sit on land at little cost then argue there is little or no demand for employment land & seek change of use to housing – which in Hampshire has a value up to 3 times as great.

Leitch Review of Skills

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?

Improvement of skills is a key theme in the LAA so there are already local partnership arrangements which reflect the County leadership role. It needs to be recognised that different areas face different demographic & employment challenges for which local responses will be most appropriate - & Counties are equipped to offer this through their local leadership role & existing partnerships.

Addressing vocational skills among the young & issues of low or poor skills among the workless should properly be the remit of local authorities. They are well placed to manage curriculum development & promote work experience schemes with local employers.

Work based skills development are quite properly based in LSCs & Business Link.

Convening

What links needs 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 skill and employment issues are properly linked to wider work on economic prosperity and development?

A range of local authority activities impact on the skills agenda & involving them at both the strategic & operational levels is essential. The local authority role in developing relationships with businesses at the local level can be a key catalyst to achieving employer engagement. Local authorities & in particular Counties, are also major employers in their own right so will generate demand as well as facilitate provision.

Local authorities have led the way in developing employment & skills strategies, particularly for excluded or disadvantaged groups. With their responsibilities for youth care, delivery of Sure Start programmes, social care etc., local authorities have the opportunity to lead multi-agency partnerships which coordinate holistic, client centred provision of support & training. In the South East where the emphasis is on 'smart growth' the local authorities can develop local solutions for local challenges. They should be charged with facilitating the establishment of the proposed Employment & Skills Board.

Funding

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

Funding streams for 14 to 19 education should be restored to local authorities to ensure the strategic responsibilities are discharged to benefit local people. LAAs provide the framework for local partnerships to deliver on skills & employment & this is the way to reflect local needs & priorities, gain better efficiency & greater freedoms & flexibilities & eventually align & pool funds.