

# **Lyons Enquiry into Local Government**

## **Slough Borough Council's Response**

### **1) Eddington Transport Study**

#### Governance

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

Local authorities can and do work well when there are shared objectives and priorities but particularly with large scale planning or transport development this is often too difficult. Therefore a combined independent planning and transport commission could be advantageous. Our concern would be democratic accountability but if this body acted as planning authority its recommendation or options could be subject to cross LA boundary referendum.

- **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?**

The key behavioural characteristic would be to take a strong strategic leadership view. Where new institutional or contractual arrangements are put in place additional funding should flow to support this.

- **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?**

Clear governance arrangements would need to be established with regard to establishing a joint planning and transport commission.

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

A clearer remit is required to influence timetables and intervene where performance is poor – it's important to claw back some of the previous transport powers. The recent approach to improving London buses has been immensely successful in terms of increased patronage and therefore this model and approach should be adopted nationally.

#### 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?**

The rail network is controlled by central government and greater influence is required from local transport authorities to ensure train timetables are appropriate, are integrated with other, local public transport provision and provide enough capacity.

#### Funding

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

Currently, outside London, bus routes are designed by the provider on a commercial basis and therefore funding arrangements should ensure that incentives are available to support adequate provision. Ring-fencing for this funding will allow more integrated cross boundary working.

- **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?**

Further research and evidence needs to be collected to identify appropriate options for adopting demand management schemes.

- **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 cost of establishing road pricing schemes is often expensive and therefore the positive impact on revenue flows is likely to be realised in the long term. It's essential to ensure road pricing schemes are done in parallel with neighbouring areas.

## 2) 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?**

Slough, as a unitary authority, has sufficient flexibility over local planning issues. Slough is densely populated and has very limited green belt and therefore any review of green belt would need to include neighbouring authorities to ensure appropriate space planning.

- **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?**

It's challenging for local authorities to work effectively across wider areas as local planning objectives can vary widely. New/reformed institutions are necessary to ensure local authorities work together. See earlier comments on the Eddington review.

- **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 independent planning commission should take responsibility for deciding on key strategic planning applications e.g. 3<sup>rd</sup> run way at Heathrow. A combined independent planning and transport commission is favoured. It is also important to be clear who this independent commission is accountable to.

### Convening

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

It's essential that there is accountability regarding options. It is envisaged that local authorities would work well on minor issues relating to planning, housing and transport using internal liaison mechanisms. However, more strategic issues relating to planning, housing and transport will be harder to resolve. See earlier comments.

#### Funding

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

The most important incentive would be in relation to additional income aimed at housing growth. For example, it might be more appropriate to demolish and build on existing housing sites which were poorly designed using poor materials in the earlier parts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, the costs of demolition and compensation would have to be funded by government. This would protect green spaces in the South East whilst achieving higher density and carbon neutral housing.

- **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?**

No response.

### 3) 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?**

Any new strategic leadership roles must ensure there are stronger links between local learning skills councils and central government departments.

The role and links between National Learning and Skills Council, Department for Education and Skills, local Learning and Skills Council and the LA to be clearly defined and open so that LA's can access each body to influence, lobby and inform with reference to the local agenda.

Learning and Skills Council to make greater provision for alternative education such as Vocational qualifications and diplomas.

To actively work with employers supporting them to provide Apprenticeship schemes.

#### Convening

- **What links need to be made between employment and skills provision, and other local services and responsibilities?**

Greater integration is needed to ensure that local employers are supporting their current employees to develop their skills in order to support progression through the workplace.

Key providers in the town such as colleges, universities, Job Centre Plus need to form a strategic group with the LA to have greater awareness of skills level in the town and then set their internal targets to meet gaps in skills as well as provision. Job Centre Plus to work more pro actively to support people into employment and concentrate on the barriers to help eradicate them.

The LSP also need to prioritise the issue of skills ensuring they have the right partners on board and are addressing the gaps.

Employers to receive incentive and support for providing volunteering and work placements for long term unemployed who want to re enter the labour market.

• **What role should local authorities play in a new demand-led skills system?**

The new demand lead skills system is welcomed and the local authority should play a fundamental role in this to ensure local skills gaps are addressed.

Greater information and knowledge of the local economy specifically growth sectors which would inform the demand. LA's and providers then to provide focus on this and work towards meeting this demand by providing the right course, at the right level.

Greater consultation with local business to assess their skills needs and establish how best they could work in partnership to ensure there is an accessible workforce that will fulfil their requirements.

• **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?**

It's essential that Local Authorities are actively involved in the proposed employment and skills boards; this will ensure that future provision of training is aligned to economic futures and trends.

- Regular contact with each other
- LA representation on board
- LA to provide regular briefs on what the local issues are and how they could be supported by the board to address the issues.
- The board to act as 'unplugging' of potential funding issues between local LSC and LA.

## Funding

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

For the recommendations to be taken forward, local authorities will require appropriate powers and funding to be effective.