

Sir Michael Lyons
Lyons Inquiry
Room 3/12
1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ

Our Ref: AW

Direct Line No: 01284 757002

19 January 2007



St Edmundsbury
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Dear Sir Michael

Promoting Economic Prosperity: Considering the implications of Eddington, Barker and Leitch

Please find below a general response from St Edmundsbury Borough Council to the three new areas of your inquiry. It has not been possible to consult with councillors formally regarding your supplementary questions, so please note that this response represents the opinions of various officers, reflecting adopted policies of the Borough Council and the Western Suffolk LSP.

Eddington Transport Study

There are very close links between transport and economic development, but it is currently difficult to harmonise transport and economic objectives. For example, some or all of the Borough of St Edmundsbury is within the Cambridge sub-region, according to regional strategies, and increasingly linked to Cambridge economically. Economic planning is done at a sub-regional level, but transport planning does not seem to be so well co-ordinated.

Roads nearly always cross boundaries, of local authorities, counties and sometimes regions, but it is very difficult to harmonise transport policies and priorities across boundaries. For example, St Edmundsbury has two towns, Bury St Edmunds and Haverhill, and they are economically dependent on two roads. Proximity to the A14, and the access it gives to Ipswich, the Haven Ports, Cambridge, London, Stansted Airport and the midlands, are vital to Bury St Edmunds' continuing prosperity, but it is hard for second-tier councils to influence trunk road policy. Similarly Haverhill has enjoyed considerable economic growth in recent years largely because of its proximity to Cambridge and it relies upon the A1307 to link it to Cambridge, the M11, Stansted and London. The A1307 is nearly all in Cambridgeshire, but improving it is not currently a high priority for Cambridgeshire County Council.

At the moment, economic growth tends to lead to a growth in traffic, and it would be helpful if more research and policy making could be devoted to ways in which economic growth can be achieved without significant transport growth.

Barker Review of Land Use Planning

The Government should continue the grant regime to support key service areas involved in delivering growth, e.g. planning delivery grant or planning and housing grant.

Local authorities can work effectively together in partnership across wider areas and the proposals in the recent white paper are a positive step towards this. This specific issue is

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addressed in the 'Pathfinder' submission of Suffolk councils to improve local governance in two-tier areas.

Leitch Review of Skills

There are obviously far-wider social benefits from education. The work of schools and colleges, and opportunities for genuine *lifelong* learning, need to be at the centre of the whole policy agenda of local authorities and other public agencies. However, the Borough Council agrees that improving skills should also be the driving force of any economic development strategy.

St Edmundsbury is lucky to have good schools and also to be in the catchment of one of the Country's top FE colleges, West Suffolk College. Indeed, the College is recognised as a national leader in the field of employer engagement and we would therefore recommend that your Inquiry makes contact with it in relation to this specific issue (Principal, Dr Ann Williams: ann.williams@westsuffolk.ac.uk).

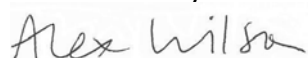
From the Borough Council's perspective, as a second-tier authority, a key governance issue in relation to the 14-19 skills agenda is the need to integrate the provision of schools and FE colleges; allowing each to specialise in their strengths and offering the widest range of coordinated and complementary learning opportunities for students. A common local strategic body (and a stronger LAA) might therefore offer the opportunity to lead and manage these two sectors in a more coordinated and effective fashion, in accordance with local needs. Provided that governance is carefully developed, pooled funding might also help to avoid the duplication and/or gaps which are possible under the current system.

Local Strategic Partnerships could also play a local role. Indeed, Western Suffolk LSP has already agreed that 'Bridging the Skills Gap' should be one of the three priorities for its Community Strategy, and has used its reward grant to fund a training needs analysis project between the college and local employers and a feasibility study for an HE building at Western Suffolk College as part of the University Campus Suffolk.

A strategic body, linked to LSPs, could also allow a more integrated approach to employer engagement, reducing the complexity of current partnerships. This is particularly important in relation to a demand-led system; the skills agenda obviously needs to be reactive to the current needs of the economy, but we also need to be more forward-looking to maintain competitive advantage and develop new markets, especially in terms of new technologies. The same applies to the provision of public services in a rapidly changing community. Again, a clear and shared strategic vision for a local area (and the skills needs that go with it), developed with local employers, would be needed, particularly if limited funding is to be properly invested.

As a final general point, recognition of the specific issues facing rural areas in respect of the 14-19 agenda need to be taken into account in any new funding arrangements.

Yours sincerely



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