

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

26th July 2006

Dear Michael

RE: LYONS INQUIRY INTO LOCAL GOVERNMENT - NATIONAL PROSPERITY, LOCAL CHOICE AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

It was good to speak with you again recently and to discuss how the work of the Academy for Sustainable Communities can assist in your review of local government. I write following your invitation to set out the role that skills and capacity building could play both in the text of your report and, crucially, in the implementation of key recommendations around place shaping.

First can I say we support fully your premise that local government should be at the heart of shaping places; creating sustainable communities which are strong, cohesive, with integrated services and where people are happy to live and work. Indeed, you will know that Sir John Egan placed local government at the heart of creating and maintaining sustainable communities in his report, 'Skills for Sustainable Communities', in 2004.

However, we do feel strongly that the need to develop skills for place shaping, and support capacity building amongst local authority Members and Officers (in addition to Local Strategic Partnership Chairs and leading players), needs to be acknowledged at the outset. Local authorities and their key stakeholders at city region, sub regional and regional level need to be supported to ensure we have enough people with the skills and knowledge to deliver the ambitious place shaping role for local government. This place shaping role is an integral part of building and maintaining sustainable communities.

We would therefore advocate strongly that your review acknowledges the Member and workforce development issues within local government to shape good quality local environments and building strong communities. The implementation of your recommendations on the ground will be severely inhibited if effort and resource is not put into addressing the skills deficit.

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The ASC was established by Government precisely to ensure we create sufficient people with the skills, knowledge and attitudes to deliver sustainable communities across the country. We are working closely with a range of public, private and community/voluntary sector partner organisations to do this in a co-ordinated way. Within local government we are in discussions with the LGA, IDeA and the Local Government Leadership Centre on how best to work with local authority Members and Officers to increase the awareness of sustainable communities. The importance of this skills and capacity building work cannot be underestimated if local councils are to be supported to embrace new ways of working, and also to embed good practice.

The ASC's business plan was recently signed off by Ministers. In addition to important research, best practice sharing and consensus building roles, our work in the next two years focuses on three core strands of professionals, young people and communities. These groups are highly relevant to your review and are work encompasses the following;

Professionals

- Seeking ways to encourage a greater number of people to join core professions to build sustainable communities (built environment, neighbourhood management and related areas) to address the current gaps;
- Promoting cross occupational learning and common modules across the core professions to promote a common understanding and develop integrated approaches to implementation. This will encompass undergraduate, professional and Continuing Professional Development elements. At the Chartered Institute of Housing Conference in June 2006, Secretary of State the Rt Hon Ruth Kelly MP launched our partnership commitment with the Institute. We are rolling this agreement out to other professional bodies including the Royal Town Planning Institute, with the objective of revising continuing professional development requirements to embrace both sustainable communities and place shaping;

Young People

- Raising knowledge, awareness and understanding of sustainable communities and encourage interest amongst young people. We want to attract new entrants into sustainable community related occupations and also foster skills of citizenship amongst young people;
- Developing an integrated careers campaign targeting young people including producing careers guides, attending careers fairs and a comprehensive web based careers hub;
- Working with the Geographical Association and CAGE, to produce curriculum content on 'How my Place Works' which will be in secondary schools by this September, and will shortly be delivering a programme to attract young people

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into Sustainable Communities professions, in collaboration with major national bodies;

Communities

- Spreading understanding of sustainable communities amongst communities themselves. This includes building capacity and capability to work effectively with professionals and the private sector, to ensure that those living in localities affected by change can be effective conduits and advocates;
- Developing a 'How To' guide on planning, implementing sustainable communities for local authorities, Local Strategic Partnership Chairs and other key stakeholders; and
- Developing a learning programme for Community Leaders in conjunction with the Local Government Association, Improvement and Development Agency and the Local Government Leadership Centre.

The policies and programmes of the ASC can help deliver the ambitious place shaping agenda outlined within your report '*National Prosperity, Local Choice and Civic Engagement*'. We believe that place shaping is at the heart of delivering sustainable communities, and that the ASC is ideally placed to facilitate the skills needed to turn this ambitious vision into reality.

Obviously this is a very abridged summary of our work and therefore if I have enclosed a copy of the ASC Business Plan and our Prospectus. If you require any further detail please do not hesitate to contact Daniel Klemm here at the Academy. Daniel can be contacted on d.klemm@ascskills.org.uk or (0113) 3944593.

Yours sincerely



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