



INSTITUTE OF HISTORIC BUILDING CONSERVATION

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Dear Sir/Madam

The Future of Local Government

I refer to the above publication which invites views on the kind of issues that need to be part of considering the future of local government.

The Institute of Historic Building Conservation is the professional body representing conservation specialists and practitioners in the public and private sectors in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. It has around fourteen hundred members divided between fourteen branches. The Institute exists to establish the highest standards of conservation practice, to support the effective protection and enhancement of the historic environment, and to promote heritage-led regeneration and access to the historic environment for all.

The Institute would suggest that the following issues need to be addressed by the review:

Best Value Performance Indicators

What have been the positive and negative impacts of Best Value Performance Indicators on the quality of local authority decision making?

Is there a need for future Best Value Performance Indicators to concentrate more on quality of outcomes and less on speed of administrative processes?

What is the relationship between national performance indicators and local political priorities?

Training and Expertise

Is there a need for better (compulsory?) training for elected members (for example in design and conservation matters)?

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How can the Government ensure that all local authorities maintain high levels of in-house expertise, for example to advise on specialist planning matters?

Do existing balances between using in-house expertise and external consultants offer the best value for money?

What kinds of expertise are best employed at local level, sub-regional level, regional level and national level?

Pro-active Work

How can local authorities be encouraged to take a more entrepreneurial approach in an increasingly risk-averse culture?

What are the barriers to effective partnerships between local government and the public, private and voluntary sectors?

Are the current regeneration funding regimes a facilitator or barrier to local regeneration initiatives?

Are local authorities prioritising social, economic and sustainable outputs when selling their own land and property, or concentrating on obtaining the highest price even where this may not be the best option for delivering urban regeneration and sustainable communities?

Provision of Services

What is the correct balance between local authorities as service providers and service facilitators?

How can best practice from highly performing authorities be transferred to underperforming authorities?

How can the fundamental conflict of interests between local authorities as land and property owners and local planning authorities be resolved?

Do neighbouring local authorities work well together and how is conflict resolved?

Do local authorities work corporately, with good linkages between different services?

Is there a quality ethos in the provision of services and making of decisions?

Should clarity about a general level of service and resourcing priorities be provided by putting more local Government activities, such as historic environment services, on a proper statutory basis?

Funding and Democracy

Does the existing balance of national and local funding for local authorities reduce local accountability to the electorate?

Which are the most democratic models of local government (e.g. committees, cabinets, elected mayors, etc)?

Which are the most effective models of local government (e.g. committees, cabinets, elected mayors, etc)?

Is there too much control by Central Government on the way in which local authorities allocate funding?

Does the current bidding culture and system of local Government finance facilitate capital expenditure on projects, whilst neglecting ongoing revenue expenditure (for example ongoing maintenance costs associated with major projects).

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Central Government

Do targets for the speed of decision making by Central Government and national bodies (for example on appeals) need to be tightened up so that they are more in line with local government targets?

How can better two way communication between central and local government be achieved?

Conclusions

The IHBC believes that it is necessary to modernise local authority functions, and equally important to modernise the approaches of the Central Government Departments that oversee them. The above issues are a starting point for this process.

I trust that this is helpful.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Chetwyn', is written over a light grey rectangular background.

Dave Chetwyn
Vice Chair