



Lifting the Burdens Task Force SOLACE Workshop, 26
September 2007

Workshop Report and Opportunity for Input to Future Work

Lifting
the burdens
task force

The aim of the workshop was to provide SOLACE members with the opportunity to feed into the work of the Lifting the Burdens Task Force by helping to shape current and future reviews.

The Task Force was set up by Ruth Kelly in July 2006 and has defined itself as a local government practitioner group with a unique voice in an increasingly crowded public sector deregulation landscape. The Task Force has taken the approach of examining the relationship which specific central government departments have with local government, aiming to have a dialogue to identify how the barriers which stifle local flexibility, efficiency and effectiveness can be removed. The Task Force has consistently found that government ministers have been very supportive of this work which links to wider objectives of public sector reform.

Any SOLACE members who were not able to attend the workshop but would like to contribute to the future work of the Task Force are invited to e-mail any further suggestions and examples of burdens in the areas outlined below to

Benjamin.wilkinson@lga.gov.uk

Attendees:

Michael Frater – Nottingham
Moira Gibb – Camden
Philip Bostock – Exeter
Stephen Jones – LGA
David Cook – Kettering
David Oliver – Northamptonshire
Liz Goodall – North Dorset
Malcolm Johnston – Ashford
Diane Tilley – Worcestershire
Marie Fallon – Newcastle
Adrienne Steatham – Teignbridge
Alasdair Bovaird – Uttlesford
Nicola Yates – North Shropshire
Ian Davis – Rugby
Julia Vernalls – London Councils
Steven Halls – Three Rivers
Mike Bennet – Solace
Steve Johnson – Redbridge
Rachel Gapp – LBTF
Ben Wilkinson – LBTF

HOME OFFICE REVIEW

Philip Bostock, Chief Executive of Exeter City Council outlined this review and invited input from participants. Key themes include:

- 1) Community safety and Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs)
- 2) Efforts to tackle anti-social behaviour and avoiding duplication of community engagement.

Points raised by participants:

- The year-on-year changes in the definitions of police information makes it very difficult to measure progress and compare outcomes
- PACT panels are being set up by police often with little consultation of local authorities. Difficulties include:
 - Unrealistically raising community expectations
 - Placing high demands on local authority services through vast lists of priorities
 - Duplicating community engagement and not recognising the role of local councillors
- The reduction in CDRP budgets and the lack of clarity around funding are damaging performance
- Danger that APACS, the new performance framework for the police, could undermine CAA

HM TREASURY REVIEW

Stephen Jones, Director of Finance and Performance at LGA outlined this review and invited input from participants. Key areas of work include:

- 1) Simplification of the PFI process for local authorities
- 2) VFM profiles, barriers to efficiencies and the Use of Resources self assessment
- 3) Working between local government and HM Revenues & Customs and ONS

Points raised by participants:

- PFI is often restricted to one service objective and linked to one government department rather than being combined to meet a wide range of local objectives
- A number of examples of ineffective PFI restrictions were given in the areas of health, schools, waste and children's services
- The blanket 3% cashable efficiency target for local government does hinder local flexibility
- Data which is collected from local authorities is often not available for benchmarking
- Restrictions in Buildings Schools for the Future which lacks flexibility to go beyond building more than simply a school for the community

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH REVIEW

Maira Gibb, Chief Executive of Camden LBC outlined the key areas which this review is aiming to influence:

- 1) The design of new health and social care PIs and ensuring alignment with PCT targets & inspection
- 2) Burdens imposed by Non Departmental Public Bodies such as the National Treatment Agency
- 3) Removing barriers to effective pooled budgets and partnership working with PCTs

Points raised by participants:

- The wrong messages are being sent out from the Government to VCS partners - raising the expectations of funding available from councils rather than supporting effective organisation and outcomes
- Collaboration with PCTs is strained by frequent PCT restructures; a lack of common geographical boundaries in some areas; PCT targets focussed on ill health rather than promoting good health
- Need greater emphasis and priority of public health from DH if health outcomes are to be achieved
- Short term NHS priorities make it difficult to jointly invest in long term prevention and LAA priorities
- LINKS need to work with existing community engagement structures

Future Reviews...

Lifting the Burdens Task Force will be launching its next series of reviews in the New Year. Participants were asked to identify burdens in the themes of transport, economic development & regeneration, employment & skills and community cohesion. The following points were highlighted:

TRANSPORT

- Restrictive practices from the Highways Agency
- Insufficient linking of transport and housing strategies from Government
- Plans for infrastructure to support growth points are currently inadequate
- Priorities of rail operators not recognising economic benefits of rail services to local areas
- Concessionary bus fares especially in 2-tier areas
- Imposition of transport schemes
- Planning of airport expansion
- Limited local flexibility in parking enforcement
- Accounting local transport plan funding
- Perverse definition of road safety improvement, e.g. Isles of Scilly ranked as least improving in this area when having zero road accidents

EMPLOYMENT & SKILLS

- Links to growth agenda and need to deliver high skilled jobs
- Lessons for growth areas from "new towns" such as Milton Keynes need to be captured
- Competence and skills in local authorities – link to LSC
- Streamlining the number of welfare benefits

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & REGENERATION

- Tension between regional and local economic development objectives
- Capital/revenue split in regeneration – Communities England
- Prescriptive delivery models for growth areas – prescription especially re private sector involvement
- SNR limits economic development role to upper tier authorities

COMMUNITY COHESION & MIGRATION

- This is a challenging area for local authorities and burdens may look quite different
- Migration from EU Accession countries
 - Race relations
 - Pressures on schools, housing and health services
- Lack of robust national statistics on migration
- Challenges of supporting new migrants
- Financial burden of migration
- Economic costs / benefits of immigration policy
- Equalities Standard – not clear on outcomes
- Impact of Darra Singh report
- Need for leadership and information on migration – opportunity for local leadership?

Many thanks to all who attended on the day – we would very much value any further input to current and future reviews, either examples of burdens or suggested areas to review.