



**East of England
Liberal Democrats**

The role and structure of local government in the East of England

East of England Regional Policy Paper 3

Chapter I: The context

1. A chequered history

For a country famous for not having had a proper revolution (or at least not recently) English society has had remarkable enthusiasm for amending, overturning or simply abolishing its civic structures – sometimes in response to changing geography, sometimes for no apparent reason at all.

In this region, for instance, Peterborough has changed its status several times, at one point forming an administrative county with Huntingdonshire, at another being subsumed into Cambridgeshire and now being a unitary (what we used to call a county borough).¹

Urban District Councils and Rural District Councils were merged to form new, larger and sometimes geographically meaningless districts in the 1974 reforms, leaving us with an identity problem ever since when explaining to outsiders the location of Three Rivers, Hertsmere, Dacorum or Mid Bedfordshire.

Elsewhere the metropolitan counties came, were unloved and went, although their shadows linger in passenger transport authorities. Slough left Buckinghamshire to be part of Berkshire but did not return when Berkshire was done away with under Michael Heseltine's reorganisations of the mid-1990s.

The Heseltine reorganisations, at one point intended to be a wholesale reform, petered out, leaving the East of England with only four unitaries but in net terms a more complex system, involving combined fire authorities, joint structure planning and latterly local area agreements and LSPs.

In the late 1990s, regional bodies were supposed to be significant under the 'New Labour' Government, but Blair's sclerotic conservatism dished the once promising model even in that part of the country where it was most likely to be successful. Some have said that the referendum in the North East has put paid to the project – even though it is largely irrelevant to the context of the East of England.

2. Don't hold your breath

In 2000 a Hertfordshire county councillor was asked by a district councillor (in all seriousness) what he planned to do now that the county council was going to be abolished. This apparently was the clear consequence of the government's plans for elected regional assemblies.

More recently, David Miliband, as local government minister, sparked a feverish round of speculation which within hours had turned again into the 'abolition of county councils'. The wording of his speech was rather different, seeming in fact to suggest

¹ From 1889-1965 the city was self-governing as the Soke of Peterborough. From 1965-1974 it formed part of the administrative county of Huntingdonshire and Peterborough. In 1974 it formed part of the enlarged county of Cambridgeshire. In 1998 it was self-governing again. The reality is more complicated, of course.

the contrary – namely the abolition of districts. In fact, it all turned out to be irrelevant because Mr Miliband is now in DEFRA²; Ruth Kelly at the LGA³ in July 2006 made her lack of support for anything other than uncontroversial mergers and reorganisations as clear as she could. And even before Miliband had moved on, his ministers were making it very clear that consensus was key and that there would be no reorganisations of district boundaries. The nonsenses created in 1974 would stay.

We can be disappointed with this but we need to develop a policy which fits the current reality. In the East of England there is not going to be anything other than marginal changes to structures. There is an outside chance that one or two districts might get unitary status, but that is at odds with the government's city regions agenda, which for the most part sees political development taking place without any changes in formal structures.

There are two consequences of this.

First, Liberal Democrats need to be very careful when making predictions about change. Local government reorganisation is not likely to happen in the short or medium term. It is therefore not worth irritating your neighbours by grandstanding about imagined local government paradises, involving a little bit of this council, a sliver or two of another and the heart of a third. Liberal Democrats should not be squabbling with Liberal Democrats over boundaries in any case – our role is to look after the interests of the people, who tend to be overlooked in most of these debates.

Second, if local government is not be improved by rationalisation, whether in terms of boundaries or in terms of tiers, then we need to develop a plan for making what we have work better.

3. Liberal principles

In a changing local government landscape it has been easy over the years to forget fundamental principles.

Liberal Democrats believe two key things:

- That power should be exercised as close to the people as possible
- That those who have power should be subject to election.

In practice, however, Liberal Democrats tend to diverge from these uncontested principles – and not just because of budget pressures. In Parliament and in council chambers there are surprisingly few advocates of local solutions to local problems. The 'party of local government' is remarkably coy when it comes to nurturing local government. Tellingly we always put up an MP on a BBC Local Elections Special in the early hours of a Friday in May.

We are also prone to embrace the quango state. Some quangos are necessary, we say; the list of those we would abolish tends to be short, if such a list exists at all. Meanwhile, there is enormous enthusiasm to get rid of the county council or the

² Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

³ Local Government Association

‘unelected’ regional assembly, even though the former is elected and the latter comprises mainly elected councillors anyway. There is far less clamour to get rid of the entirely nominated Regional Development Agencies, the Environment Agency or Ofsted.

4. Being fed to the Lyons

Liberal principles interestingly appear to be shared by others. Sir Michael Lyons, former Chief Executive of Birmingham and recently acting chairman of the Audit Commission, has been tasked by the Government not only to give some thought to the perennial and potentially destructive issue of local taxation but also to examine the role of local government overall.

He says:

I am therefore of the opinion that there would be a number of benefits to greater devolution, which are in the national interest and to the benefit of individual citizens, including:

- *a more efficient allocation of resources between and within services;*
- *greater value obtained from local public services;*
- *enhanced delivery of a smaller set of national priorities;*
- *potential benefits from enhanced innovation; and*
- *greater public trust in the system of local and national government as a whole. ...*

I also think there is a wider role for local government as the voice of a whole community and as an agent of place, a role I describe as 'place-shaping', which includes:

- *building and shaping local identity;*
- *representing the community;*
- *regulating harmful and disruptive behaviours;*
- *maintaining the cohesiveness of the community;*
- *helping to resolve disagreements;*
- *working to make the local economy more successful;*
- *understanding local needs and preferences and making sure that the right services are provided to local people; and*
- *working with other bodies to respond to complex challenges.*⁴

It is difficult to find a word to quarrel with here. This is our territory and we need to reclaim it.

⁴ *National prosperity, local choice and civic engagement: a new partnership between central and local government for the 21st century*, Lyons Inquiry (Executive Summary)

Chapter 2: Speaking up for local government

1. The role of elections

If we respond to our own principles and to the thoughts of Lyons, we would conclude that local government must be the key to providing leadership for local communities.

We must stop compromising on this. We have come to accept that (for instance) school governors are better arbiters of what the public want than councillors. Governors have a role: but parents are offered a choice when electing their councillors, something routinely missing when electing parent governors. In most other cases the situation is far worse: for many of the institutions which spend our money and govern our lives there is not even the theoretical possibility of electoral contest.

Councillors are also very obviously accountable with addresses, phone numbers and e-mail addresses on council websites in a way which is not the case with most of the others who have taken over the right to determine the spending of public money over past decades.

This means that we should without apology demand that councils and councillors have a much greater say in the management of the police, the running of schools, the delivery of public transport and the provision of healthcare. Legislation currently militates against a significant role for councillors in these areas, but nothing is going to change if we apologetically salute the status quo.

2. Delivering services better – a ten point plan

1. Liberal Democrats must have vision

Robert Redford in ‘The Candidate’ famously said on being elected ‘What do we do now?’ More recently, as described in Chapter 1, we are told that the role of the council is to be a place-shaper.

Liberal Democrats need to ensure that they have developed a vision for their council area, which is both realistic (ie relating to services which the council provides) and in tune with the desires of the people.

Local parties, working with their council groups, should ensure that there is a clear manifesto. Ruling groups must ensure that they have their hands on the levers of power so that the strategic planners are doing the bidding of the councillors and not vice versa.

2. Liberal Democrats must look at the best and learn from it.

If Liverpool (as in fact is the case) is running a first class furniture recycling service which picks up from your door after a week’s notice, then every Liberal Democrat council should at least consider whether it is right for them. It is too easy to hide behind budget restrictions when finding reasons not to do better.

Liberal Democrat councils must use organisations like IDeA⁵ to provide challenge. Councillors should be required to get out more: go and see what happens in other councils, go to conferences, including party conferences. Liberal Democrat councillors should aspire to help other councils through peer challenge.

Group awaydays should become the norm – either on their own or in tandem with other groups. These should include challenges from colleagues in the region and from other organisations.

3. Liberal Democrats must be green

In parts of Belgium recycling has reached 70%. No council in this country currently gets near this. We can and must do better.

Meanwhile most council staff drive to work, contributing to the congestion that the council itself is pledged to fight. Councils should show leadership over travel to work plans, solar panels, reduction in waste creation, reuse of grey water, rationalisation of working conditions and assisting public transport. They should be leading the community debate on climate change.

4. Liberal Democrats must provide value for money

There is a huge amount that can be done to reduce costs without reducing services. Why does virtually every council have its own IT system, its own payroll system, its own leased car system etc? Why is this not done on a countywide basis or even regionally?

5. Liberal Democrats must be modern

If we don't look modern, then there are plenty of political parties willing to do so in our stead.

Liberal Democrats should blow away the cobwebs from local government thinking: the lawyers who constantly find a reason not to do something, the old-timers who queue to don the mayoral gown and the empire-builders who don't want to learn from neighbouring councils or from other parties. We should lead the way on new, more efficient and effective ways of working by shifting resources to where they are needed for tomorrow from where they have been directed in the past.

Liberal Democrat councils should have good quality (ie customer friendly) web-sites, modern all-purpose access points, high quality debate and inclusive, public participation, proper devolution to area committees and effective scrutiny processes involving the public and business.

6. Liberal Democrats must be business friendly

⁵ Improvement and Development Agency. One of a family of national bodies servicing local government, funded principally by government grant. Its role is to help local government improve itself.

Without business there is no prosperity. The business agenda is different from local government but it is one with which we have to work. We should explore secondments between businesses and council staff.

7. Liberal Democrats must work in partnership

The days when we could work in silos have gone. We need to be good at working with the police, health services, with commerce and industry, with other tiers of government, with EEDA⁶ and EERA⁷, with the Environment Agency and with community groups.

8. Liberal Democrats must be democrats

Liberal Democrats must be much more willing to delegate decisions and even budgets to local level. It is at local level where people know what needs to be done. So we must set up area committees which can take real decisions (eg over planning and highways) and let them have their own budgets.

The public need more than just consultation: they need to become part of the decision-making, involved in designs, plans and ideas from inception.

9. Liberal Democrats must champion diversity

It is not enough to say we believe that there need to be more women, young people and people from ethnic and other minorities in public life: we need to go out and find them so that our council groups more closely represent the people who vote for us and the public and large.

Moreover, we need constantly to improve our services, to make them usable by people who aren't good at filling in forms, who are unable to use the internet, who don't read too well, don't work in offices, can't walk, can't hear or just don't think like we do.

10. Liberal Democrats must be campaigners

For those services which the council does not provide we should be the advocates of the people. If the health service is underfunded or poorly managed then we should be mounting constant challenge – and resourcing that challenge. If our roads are congested because the Government has failed to give us the powers that are enjoyed by the Mayor of London then we should be campaigning to receive those powers.

Above all, Liberal Democrats must be liberal.

⁶ East of England Development Agency: a quango appointed by the DTI comprising one third councillors and two thirds business and other interests

⁷ East of England Regional Assembly: a 'voluntary chamber', set up initially to monitor EEDA but more recently gaining powers over regional planning plus other functions. Two thirds of its members are councillors

Chapter 3: Parishes, regions and city regions

I. Parish and town councils

For the party which introduced parish councils in 1894, the Liberal Democrats' attitude to them has sometimes been ambivalent: There are now around 10,000 parish councils in England and Wales. The enthusiasm expressed in theory can evaporate when confronted with the reality.

Parish councils represent the first tier of local democracy. Although not having the bureaucratic scrutiny process of principal authorities, they are subject to the very real scrutiny of the voters they meet in the street and the pub.

Crucially they are not subject to capping in the same way that district councils are and can precept according to their needs. Some parish precepts are actually higher than their cash strapped districts to provide services the districts cannot afford.

Many parish councils have achieved Quality Parish Council (QPC) status, a measure of the competence of the council, and employ full time clerks and other staff. They have their own offices and newsletter.

Local government units in England tend to be among the largest in Europe. France by contrast has more than 30,000 communes (each with a mayor). Local government on the Continent is truly local. If we are to achieve the same amount of empowerment for parish councils, we must devolve more responsibilities to them, but make sure they are capable of undertaking them

There are, therefore, issues that need to be considered in giving parishes more powers.

- Some parish councils (and in particular parish meetings) are such small geographic and demographic units that there are not the people to manage any increased powers effectively. In these cases it would be appropriate to encourage grouping of parishes to share clerks and facilities for the common good
- In some parishes councillors are elected unopposed. These would not qualify for QPC status and should not be given any increased powers. However in many larger parishes elections are contested with the same vigour as those for district and county elections.
- Many local papers take a keen interest in local parish council affairs and so there is the opportunity of real public challenge of what the councils are doing, particularly in the correspondence columns.
- Some principal authority functions such as planning and environmental health could not be devolved to parishes due to the expertise required and the complexity of the issues involved. Additionally there could be conflicts of interest owing to land ownership problems, especially where farmers dominate.

- Some parts of the region are unparished – especially urban areas: Although there is a policy of promoting the formation of community councils in urban areas there has not been much take up of this idea possibly due to lack of enthusiasm at the district/borough level.

We must therefore encourage and facilitate Parish councils to modernize in the context of the 21st century and in line with the vision we had for them when we set them up in 1894, but recognize that one hat does not fit all.

One of the main ways forward is through the QPC system. In addition Liberal Democrats on principal authorities should also:

- ensure that there are district, unitary or county council staff on hand to help with parish projects, financial management and ethical standards
- encourage candidates to put themselves forward at parish elections to ensure that there is choice
- support council newspapers to feature the activities of parishes.

In addition parishes should be encouraged to pool resources in order to ensure that the quality of their work was improved and that value for money is given for devolved budgets.

2. Area committees

In unparished areas, district, unitary and county councillors could meet together (in public) to determine local issues. These arrangements are usually known as area committees.

Area committees also operate perfectly well in parished areas: the model can appear cumbersome, with sometimes three tiers of local government sitting round the table. But the proof is in the pudding: any mechanism which ensures that local government communicates with itself and delivers better services must be worth pursuing.

3. Regional assemblies

At the other end of the scale we have regional assemblies.

Much nonsense is talked about these increasingly powerful bodies:

- They are creatures of Brussels, invented by the European Union to break up the United Kingdom⁸
- Their role in regional planning is an outrageous novelty invented by New Labour to undermine councils
- They are expensive luxuries
- They are unelected

None of these is true but all bar the first has a grain of truth. The reality is that there is always a need for councils to talk together, especially on issues like spatial planning:

⁸ This is one of the fantasies inserted from time to time in the region's media by UKIP

EERA in this context is merely the successor of SERPLAN⁹ and SCEALA¹⁰. That said, it is true to say that the abolition of structure plans has led to real powers being exercised at regional rather than local level (but counties were never seen as that local or that democratic when there were arguments with district councils about structure plans!). Regional assemblies, moreover, operate on a shoestring, mainly using human resources lent them by principal councils.

But the most misleading accusation – and this tends to be shared by MPs who should know better – is that regional assemblies are unelected.

It is true that they are not directly elected – but neither were SERPLAN or SCEALA, nor is the Essex Fire and Rescue Authority or the Norfolk Police Authority. But two thirds of the members of EERA are councillors, including all council leaders (who are, one presumes, elected). There is also a top-up to ensure that there is proportional representation within the councillor section based on votes cast in recent council elections. EERA, in contrast to the House of Commons, looks positively Athenian.

The problems lie elsewhere. Liberal Democrats continue to believe that there should be a regional tier exercising functions which are currently wrongly exercised by Whitehall, running all the way from planning appeals, to education policy to the health service. There has been precious little of this devolution to regional assemblies (and this may be the reason why the North East referendum failed).

Worse still, the undemocratic part of the regional assembly – the business section, the voluntary sector, higher education and the environmental groups – actually has votes on matters like regional spatial planning policy. All these bodies should have a voice but not a vote. Only those elected by the people should have a final say.

This is something which needs to be pursued at national level. But at regional level Liberal Democrats must ensure that EERA is as democratic as possible.

Liberal Democrat places on EERA bodies are filled largely by election, involving all principal councillors. But the other political groups have been coy in revealing how they make their choices. We should demand greater transparency.

Liberal Democrat groups need to take their role in EERA more seriously, putting forward candidates in the EERA Group's election, engaging fully with the regional agenda and making sure that the structures work for local people.

Regional issues need to be aired in *Focus*, where appropriate, in council group meetings and in local party executives.

We should not, however, drop our commitment to demanding that EERA should be directly elected.

⁹ The London and South East Regional Planning Conference covering Bedfordshire, Essex and Hertfordshire, as well as all the other home counties and London itself. Not all councils were represented on its governing body.

¹⁰ Standing Conference of East Anglian Local Authorities, covering Cambridgeshire, Norfolk and Suffolk.

4. City Regions

The City Regions agenda is sometimes seen as an alternative to the older, Prescottian idea of regional assemblies. It has also been seen as something to do with local government reorganisation.

Both perceptions are wrong. The city regions idea is fairly venerable, at least in academic circles, and involves finding ways in which British cities might compete better with their European equivalents. If a city were to work with its hinterland (its travel to work area) on improving transport, strategic planning and skills then there would be greater prosperity. There may need to be superstructures to ensure that policies and activities are pulled together. There may also need to be greater devolution from central government. Examples elsewhere in the country include Birmingham and its neighbours – the old West Midland metropolitan county – and Bristol and its neighbours – formerly the county of Avon.

To some degree this may suggest that the Conservatives were overhasty and over party political in dismantling the metropolitan counties and some of their non-metropolitan equivalents. This is doubtless true but seems somewhat irrelevant to the East of England. Here there were never metropolitan counties nor yet cities in anything other than a purely formal sense.

But the Regional Cities East project, involving at least Peterborough, Ipswich, Luton, Norwich, Colchester and Southend shows imaginative thinking: the concept of an urban centre working with its hinterland to improve policy formation over matters like transport infrastructure must be something which we should support. If, in turn, these urban areas talk to each other in developing these ideas (under, at the time of writing, a Liberal Democrat chair) then so much the better.¹¹

For Liberal Democrats the only issue here is one of governance: is it essential that these new city regions within this region will require a directly elected mayor? Or can the clarity of policy and accountability be delivered without a major change in structures? The answer is affirmatively the latter.

We must maintain our opposition to directly elected mayors for the simple reason that they enshrine all that is worst about the Cabinet and scrutiny system imposed upon us by New Labour.

The joint mechanisms for the management of city regions must be clear and transparent – and must admit opposition input. For governance to involve merely a secret cabal of council leaders, carving up spending and policy making like the Yalta great powers, is a denial of Liberalism. Opposition groups must be given the opportunity to contribute and to scrutinise. The public need to know when decisions are taken and to witness their leaders taking them so that they know whom to remove from office and whom to support.

¹¹ For more information visit the Regional Cities East website: <http://www.rce.org.uk>

Chapter 4: The modern councillor and modern governance

I. Cabinets and Mayors

One of the most striking changes introduced by Labour has been the Cabinet and Scrutiny system, which has affected all but a handful of councils.¹² In Watford and Bedford this has manifested itself as a directly-elected mayor system.

All versions of this new system stem from a false premise – namely that there is something admirable about the governance system practised nationally in which Parliament is led to believe that it holds ministers to account: in reality, of course, ministers can get on doing more or less what they please, safe in the knowledge that they have the most of the power.

This system is particularly pernicious at local level where local people have a not unreasonable expectation that decisions will be taken close to them and in their presence: they expect to see major policy being determined in plenary session and are mystified to find that the council cannot require – merely ask – the cabinet to take action in most cases.

Perhaps the greatest irony is that the decision to require local cabinet meetings to be held in public has shifted the real point of decision to some other unpublished time and place: in reality, therefore, policy continues to be made in private before being rehashed at official cabinet meetings to which the press and the public have been admitted. Such meetings in some cases last only minutes and lack any challenge from public or opposition (or from the backbenchers of the ruling party). Concepts like scrutiny and call-in, supposed to protect the public and make up for the abolition of meaningful debate, depend entirely upon the goodwill of the handful of councillors who have time or energy to manage or scrutinise portfolios.

This is not to say that there is not some merit in the new system of governance. The days when committees operated in silos with no thought for anything approaching corporate policy-making are certainly not worth retrieving. Nor, in some councils, was there always meaningful debate in those committees, whose role was perceived as driving through the agenda of the local constituency party.

Until we get legislation to remove the straitjacket from councils, Liberal Democrats can deliver something better than the statutory minimum described above:

- Major decisions should be taken in full council and treated as binding on the cabinet, as are plans and frameworks
- Cabinet meetings should involve opposition members sitting at the table (unfortunately without votes until the legislation is repealed), able to propose amendments, participate fully in debate and able to express dissent in the minutes
- Scrutiny needs to be properly funded: scrutiny decisions should normally be welcomed and in the majority of cases adopted by the ruling group

¹² Smaller district councils are permitted to continue to operate the committee system.

- Scrutiny committees, as far as is practicable, should be chaired by opposition councillors
- The public should be encouraged to present petitions at cabinet meetings and ask questions
- Powers, where possible, should be delegated to area committees involving councillors from other tiers where appropriate
- Meetings should be held in public with published papers to the maximum extent allowed by law.

In addition, councils may well need to consider splitting the policy formation function from the scrutiny function – a number of councils have ‘cabinet panels’ which predigest new policy in a relaxed forum. These achieve most value when led by a portfolio holder: scrutiny, by contrast, is more likely to be successful when in the hands of the opposition.

2. A new breed of councillor

It used to be possible to tell a party activist that standing for the council would give them the chance of taking real decisions – a power notably not exercised by most members of the House of Commons. The situation has changed dramatically: even on the so-called ‘quasi-judicial’ committees, like planning and licensing, councillors’ hands are fettered with ever tighter government guidelines as to what they may or may not decide. It is thus hardly surprising that, despite a marked improvement in the allowances paid to elected members, it is still difficult to recruit and retain effective councillors.

Concerns have also been expressed about the fact that a worryingly high proportion of councillors seem to be detached from the party, behaving more like well-meaning independents than representatives of a coherent political movement. Some of this stems from the apparent shortage of eligible candidates amongst the membership base. Some, however, stems from an older tradition within the Liberal Democrats that sought to shun concepts like whips and ideology.

The qualities sought in an effective modern councillor are:

- Advocate for the community
- The ability to campaign
- The ability to produce at least effective street letters
- Basic computing skills (eg e-mail and web browsing)
- Public speaking skills (suitable for committee work – skills in dealing with public meetings or set-piece debates are a bonus)
- Communication skills for engaging with the public
- The ability to manage a heavy postbag and e-mail load
- An understanding of the party’s background and ideology

Some councillors will also need extra skills such as:

- The ability to direct and lead a large, corporate organisation
- Skills at communicating internally with colleagues and externally with the media

The list may appear hopelessly idealistic. Yet these people do exist within the membership in fairly large numbers. The failure to deploy them stems largely from a lack of will either to seek new talent or to replace councillors who have had their day. This is typified in the Mad March Rush, when candidates are sought for winnable wards as the countdown to nomination day ticks on. The result is often arm-twisted candidates who are reluctant, older councillors who have been persuaded yet again to stay on and new entrants who are not properly committed to the party's values. Moreover, there is still far too great a mismatch between the councillor population (white, retired, male, middle-class) and the underlying population whom they are supposed to represent.

It would, however, be easy to give in to a counsel of despair. There are still important council roles to be performed and we need to identify those best placed to do them and to support them once they have been elected.

Liberal Democrats should:

- Insist that all sitting councillors are subjected to a full re-approval process before they restand: this process should be no easier for sitting councillors than for unknowns, although the questions asked may clearly differ
- Ensure that there is a thorough approval process for new candidates to ensure they share the values and beliefs of the Liberal Democrats
- Set targets for candidates like data gathering and campaigning
- Provide proper mentoring and support arrangements for new councillors, including a detailed understanding of politics-life balance issues
- Endeavour to give all councillors meaningful and fulfilling roles within groups and on council bodies
- Actively seek to recruit party members and election candidates from underrepresented groups
- Conduct feedback and appraisal discussions with councillors to support personal and team development
- Be prepared to undergo training and development on an ongoing basis
- Conduct exit interviews with all councillors who have decided to stand down, so that any underlying problems with candidate selection, expectations or group dynamics can be addressed.

3. Funding

No paper on councils can avoid the issue of funding. Many parts of the region have elections every year and it is evident that these are won only by putting out increasing quantities of targeted literature and with modern campaigning.

This needs to be paid for. It is now some years since the new, higher levels of council allowance came into play. For most councillors it would be reasonable that 10% of council allowances – both basic and special responsibility allowances (including allowances for the police authority, the regional assembly and the like) – should be made over directly to the local party or at least to the council group.

This money can be used to fund elections and by-elections, to hire organisers and press officers and for other related uses.

Chapter 5: Challenging the Government

Much of this would be made easier by improved legislation. All we can do at this stage is to set out our demands.

1. Local government needs to be given far more power over its local community so that it can genuinely undertake place-shaping
2. Local government is no less capable than PCTs of running the health service: indeed the evidence shows that the quality of management and the financial system have conspired to create in places quite awesome deficits.
3. Local government needs to regain its ascendancy in law and order: independent members of police authorities, as well as magistrate members, should be abolished so that police authorities comprise all and only elected members. Basic command units should where possible be coterminous with local government boundaries.
4. Any precepting authority should comprise elected members only.
5. The Government's enthusiasm for city regions needs now to be matched with legislation to devolve powers over transport and skills to city region consortia: the background hum over elected mayors is a distraction and needs to be abandoned
6. The legislation over Cabinet and scrutiny arrangements needs to be amended so that all councillors are once again in a position to influence events
7. No new powers from councils should be given to regional assemblies unless a persuasive case can be made. There should be no new regionalisation unless a persuasive case can be made. There should be no further central government attempts to regionalise the police and fire services.
8. There should be powers and funding for EERA to scrutinise all regional bodies, such as the Ambulance Trust, the Strategic Health Authority and GO-East.