

Note of Meeting

Urban Commission

13 February 2006

ICC, Broad Street, Birmingham B1 2EA

A list of those present is attached as an appendix to this note.

1. Digest of the Last Meeting

Members noted the digest of the last meeting held on 25 July 2006.

2. City Regions Work

The LGA's document "*City Regions and Beyond*", an initial contribution to the city regions debate was launched at the meeting.

Members received a presentation by Paul Hildreth, ODPM advisor on city and urban policy, on the development of city regions policy. Members can access Mr Hildreth's slides at www.lga.gov.uk.

Members also received a presentation by Councillor Chris White, Chair of the LGA's Regeneration Board on the publication "*City Regions and Beyond*"

In response to Mr Hildreth's and Councillor White's presentations members made a number of comments, including the following:

- the issue of local government restructuring eg, unitary authorities vis a vis the city regions debate must not be lost sight of: government must provide a blueprint of how this will work;
- this debate is about spreading economic growth to the outer regions from the city regions. However, the Urban Commission should be looking at the interests of all urban authorities, and not just the cities.
- there must national government intervention in relation to connectivity, transport, infrastructure, etc. City regions will not be able to sort these issues out.;
- there is a plethora of ideas coming through from central government, eg. neighbourhoods, city regions, local government reorganisation. The government's motives for this are questionable. It would be much simpler to establish statutory joint committees reflecting local authority areas;
- the LGA is "sitting on the fence" in its response - this cannot work without structural change;

- there is no discussion on eg. health restructuring – the two are interlinked and this must be reflected in the debate on city regions.
- The ODPM must be more open in relation to consultation.
- A delegate from Telford & Wrekin said that his authority (a unitary with a population of 135,000) was outside the boundaries for the city regions of Birmingham and requested clarification on what was going to happen with similar towns.
- It was emphasised by one member that local authorities know what is wanted on the ground and don't need to go to a regional quango, Eg. PCTs should be done away with – local government, with its democratic mandate, could do better.
- A member suggested that before any action is taken there must be a level playing field.

Mr Hildreth responded by saying that David Miliband, the Minister for Local Government, genuinely wishes to listen to local government and is taking time to go out to the core cities to discuss the issues surrounding the city regions debate. Mr Hildreth added that government has commissioned research in the form of a "state of cities" report to provide further evidence.

Councillor White responding by saying that although the rationale for the city regions concept is economic, we must not lose sight of the fact that these are places where people live, along with their families, friends and colleagues ie. communities. Councillor White went on to say that these communities would benefit from a greater devolution of powers, including economic development powers, to the appropriate level and that decisions about the appropriate level should be left to councils and their partners.

The Commission noted the report which set out the LGA's planned work on city regions.

3. Urban Commission Priorities for 2006

The Commission agreed that its priorities for 2006 would be supporting the LGA interventions on city regions, neighbourhood governance and transport.

4. Key Messages for the LGA delivering sustainable communities conference

Members agreed that those attending the conference should promote the LGA's key messages, as outlined in the report tabled at the meeting.