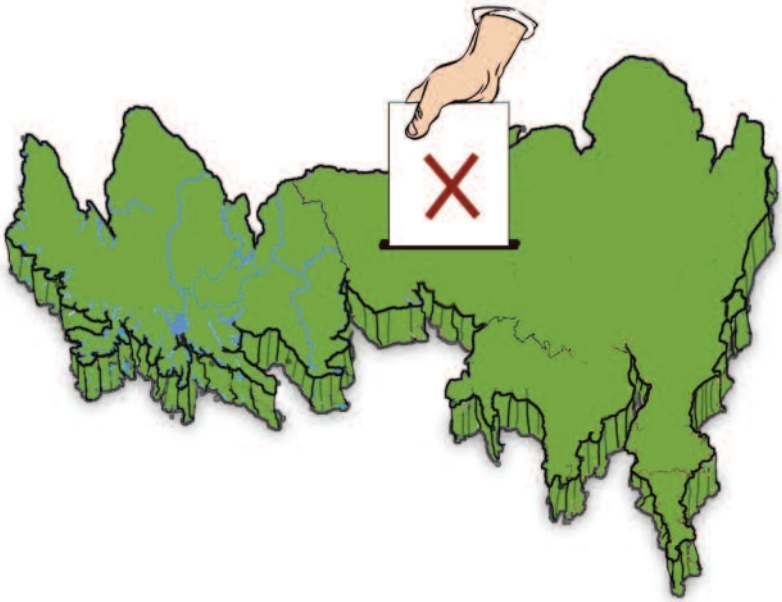
Directly Elected Mayors

Are they appropriate for all major UK cities?

with contributions from
Anthony Browne, Richard Kemp
and Steve Malanga

edited by
Tom Shakespeare



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Introduction

Tom Shakespeare, *Localis*

Although we often associate modern style of mayors in the UK (mainly London) as imports from the US, there is a relatively long history of mayors stretching as far back as the 12th Century in UK. Most modern day mayors in the UK are now ceremonial, but there is increasingly becoming an appetite for more elected mayors across the political spectrum. The introduction of the Mayor of London has transformed the governance of London, and has only increased the demand for them across the country. However, many argue that London is a special case – and that the need for a Mayor in London came about because there was a clear political void. But is London a special case, or is there a more widespread political void which elected mayors can fill?

In this first publication of its type for Localis, this issue is debated between Anthony Browne, Director of policy for Boris Johnson- an advocate of mayors - and Richard Kemp, Leader of the Liberal Democrat group on the LGA, who is skeptical about their value. The final article, by Steve Malanga of the City Journal in the US, takes an international perspective and shows us that the debate about local accountability is not unique to the UK.

In his article, Richard Kemp challenges mayoral supporters to 'show me the evidence'. He argues that if the current success rate of Mayors was applied across the Country it would be a disaster. He goes on to say that they do not improve turnout and that in fact Council Leaders are frequently just as well known. It is important that local people have a say about how their area is governed, but most importantly – local areas need to have the power to act. This requires a radical overhaul of the quango state, or as Malanga intelligently articulates in his response: "A mayor who is responsible for only a small portion of local government will be as ineffective as an elected council with the same limited responsibilities."

However, in Anthony Browne's article, there is a strong sense that

mayors help to improve the profile of local government. In order to overcome the over-centralisation of government in the UK, it is vital that local government proves itself to be strong, and mayors can help to achieve this. In the case of London – the strong political leadership has allowed projects that would not have got off the ground to take off – such as Crossrail or the successful Olympics bid. Another thing that mayors can help to solve is the party political operators which dominate local Councils. Browne goes on to argue that the reason mayors are not more common now is because of the established political elite who are determined not to give up power.

The essays here are punchy and persuasive, yet despite the strong differences of opinion, we can begin to see the potential for some kind of consensus for the future

In Malanga's article there is a recognition that there are a number of different potential mayoral models, ranging from impartial City managers appointed by Council to directly elected mayors – many of which have emerged in the US. His main argument is that different cities have taken different approaches and that this should be welcomed. This chimes very closely with what Localis has argued – local people deciding local governance, and that one solution in one place is not necessarily the best solution in another. There is no one size fits all approach. However, as Malanga and other contributors point out – the lines of political accountability need to be clear. This is a problem which pervades the whole political system – from Regional Development Agencies and central government to local government, and until we address this question changes to the model of governance are unlikely to have any significant impact. Perhaps it is a question of the chicken or the egg – or maybe the solution relies on both chicken *and* egg simultaneously - who knows?

These essays provide a real insight into the current thinking on the future of mayors and local government. The essays here are punchy and persuasive, yet despite the strong differences of opinion, we can begin to see the potential for some kind of consensus for the future. We hope you enjoy reading them.

Chapter 1
Show me the evidence that mayors are a good idea

Cllr Richard Kemp, *Leader of the LGA Liberal Democrat Group*

2,000 words to describe why we shouldn't support the concept of elected mayors in British politics. That's far too many – two will do "Stoke; Doncaster!" QED as we say down the pub in Liverpool. Thank you and good bye.

Stoke and Doncaster are two of the twelve councils who have adopted a mayoral model of governance (some say its thirteen but I will come back to that). They are two of the seven councils in the UK that are causing the Government, Audit Commission and political parties real concern about control and governance. Let's put this into perspective. That's 28.5 percent of all poorly performing councils. If that figure were applied to all the 380 councils in England it would mean 108 councils would be poorly performing and if that were the case local government would be shut down and rightly so!

Let's put the other side of the case. I fully agree that mayoralties in places like Watford, Newham and Hackney have radically transformed their local councils for the better. Mayors in those boroughs have taken a clear internal role by working with their senior staff to cut out waste, improve decision making and improve outcomes for residents in terms of the services provided by the council and its partners. They have also given a clear external role by developing to provide a strong base within the economies and communities to provide the best possible future for their areas. But so have council leaders in Hull, Islington, Rotherham, Coventry and Walsall. All these are councils which at the start of the CPA process in 2002 were heavily criticised by external inspectors and their citizens but where massive change has been produced internally and externally.

Even if you take out Doncaster and Stoke and just look at the other

10 (ignoring the fact that North Tyneside also had mayoral wobbles early on) you find no difference in the uplift in standards in mayoral authorities than that in comparator authorities led by leaders. Even the most partisan of mayoral cheer leaders, the New Local Government Network and DCLG (in the form of Paul Rowsell) have conceded the lack of evidence in terms of performance or the degree of trust afforded to mayors.

Stoke has now decided by referendum to abolish the mayoralty. This will leave in place a very weak council which will need a lot of help to bring round. But this has been done as the examples given above of Hull etc show. Doncaster will have a change in Mayor as the Mayor has announced that he will not seek re-election in June. But this will leave a 6 month gap between the Mayor heavily losing a vote of confidence and a new Mayor being inducted. I strongly suspect that in Doncaster residents there would vote for the abolition of the position if such a choice was put to them.

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Before coming back to what lessons I learn from this let us look at the thirteenth example which is most regularly quoted with approbation – London. London could be considered to be two things – but it cannot be considered as local government in any real way. Local government in London is provided by 32 unitary authorities who provide the full range of services of any upper tier authority and the Corporation of London, a small but perfectly formed unitary in its own special way. London has an Assembly (the GLA) which has its own pretensions but is basically a big scrutiny committee. In theory it has the all important job of agreeing the budget. In practice it has never been able to do more than tinker at the edges of the authority of the Mayor. It can check, call to account and monitor – all important functions, but the amount of things it can actually do is minimal. Indeed London councils, the voluntary membership organisation that brings together the 33 councils, has far more power and authority.

London could be described as a region. It is recognised as a region in its own right. It is one of the nine English regions; it has a regional government office and a regional budget, minister etc. Its population and GDP demands that it be treated in this sort of way and demands that coherence is brought to the provision of services and preparations for future threats and opportunities. No-one is suggesting anywhere else in the Country that there should be a mayor for a region. No mayor for the Northwest or Northeast or Yorkshire and the Humber. That would be regional government - a concept which Labour are too timid to advance and the Tories oppose!

I believe that not only London but the rest of the country should have an elected regional body

London could be described as a conurbation. It is an agglomeration of areas and communities which hang together for employment, entertainment, educational and other practical purposes. Clearly, as a conurbation coherence needs to be brought to the planning of services and preparations for the future of this conurbation. No-one is suggesting Mayors for conurbations anywhere else in the Country. No Mayors for Merseyside or Leeds/Bradford or Greater Manchester.

Solutions exist for regional and sub-regional activity. I believe that not only London but the rest of the country should have an elected regional body. Not one man or woman but a deliberative body capable of looking widely at the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the region.

At a lower level, the major conurbations have been working together for years. Irrespective of party control councils have merged budgets, planning and thinking as they have understood that no urban council is an island unto itself. Those informal activities have increasingly become formal with conurbations like Greater Liverpool and Greater Manchester coming together with legal agreements between themselves and the Government (Multi Area Agreements) and in terms of governance a range of public leaders' committees.

At both levels there is a need for all three political parties to develop

policies for governance and the break down of the quango state. Some moves have been made with Connexions and LSC activity returning to local councils (who often continue to deliver services on a sub regional basis. There is, however, still much to be done. Too much lies in the hands of bureaucrats in a government office of quangocrats at the RDAs. Current government proposals for regional select committees of MPs and regional ministers are laughable. Regional ministers have failed to make an impact they are probably not even a household name in their own household!

So if we ignore London because it's an irrelevance in local government terms where does that leave me and others in the quest for Mayors? I believe that there are some key questions that we need to ask:

1. Has a mayoral system improved turnout? No. Turnouts have been roughly the same in mayoral and comparator authorities after an initial first time surge. Much is made of London but a 45% turnout in an election which attracted national and international attention is no great shakes.
2. Are mayors better known in their areas than Council Leaders? There is no evidence to suggest this. Council Leaders, especially of big councils, are very well known in their areas and have local and regional media exposure.
3. Have mayors done better in improving the efficiency of their councils and improving levels of service? Clearly the answer is that it depends on the Mayor but in aggregate – No!
4. Have mayors done well in increasing investment (of all sorts) in their area because of exposure or effectiveness. Many councils have been able to show strong regeneration activity but no more so than council leaders. The Mayors of SE London can point to the Olympics (although the whole Country is paying for it). The Leaders of Liverpool and Manchester can point to massive international activity (the Capital of Culture and the Commonwealth games) and massive physical city centre regeneration.

5. Is a mayoral system more stable than a leader system? Clearly not. Although there has been a low turnover of Mayors there appears to be no difference with the turnover of Leaders. There does appear to have been a rapid turnover of deputy mayors!
6. Have the mayors brought more people into the political system? No obvious signs of this.
7. Have mayors enhanced diversity and created new models of Leaders? One woman out of twelve. No ethnic minorities. Mostly middle aged, middle class men replacing other middle aged, middle class men!

So an outside observer would probably need a lot of convincing that change is necessary. As I look at the three parties the idea has largely run out of steam. Labour Ministers believe in Mayors but not councillors and it is not seen as the white hope for local government that it seemed to be in 1999. Lib Dems have never been impressed with the idea. We did not even initiate the proposals in Watford although we won the ensuing mayoral election.

The Tories are deeply split. They launched the idea for twelve mayors for major areas (although they were a peculiar selection of authorities not necessarily the biggest or best known). Ironically the launch of the idea took place in Coventry where the controlling Tory Group could move a referendum tomorrow if it chose to. When I challenged the Tory Leaders of Coventry, Leeds and Birmingham to put down a resolution before their councils for a referendum on the issue I got a deafening silence.

You might say that most councillors oppose mayoralties but it is not in our interest or because we don't like change. Wrong. Most of us don't oppose them at all. I am an agnostic on the subject. I believe three things:

Firstly, I want evidence. Local government has become the most efficient part of the public sector (according to HM Treasury) because we have been open to new ideas, have embraced change and have made massive alterations to the substance of what we do and the gov-

ernance by which we oversee it. The evidence is either none existent or wholly inconclusive and for change to occur we need better than that.

Secondly, we need to look at all the options. I believe that local councils and their residents should be able to adopt the system of governance that they feel appropriate for their area and which they jointly approve by some method or another, preferably a referendum.

Thirdly, we need to make changes in governance to all the bodies which impact on a community. Whatever system councils use, we are open, transparent and accountable – not least at the ballot box. So the way we spend the 25% of public money that we spend in our communities can be approved of or opposed by residents at the ballot box. But what about the PCTs, the colleges, the RDAs, the environment agency, the housing associations and the countless quangos who sit around the LSP table and spend the remaining 75%. There is no point in making what are at best marginal changes to the way councils work if the quango state remains untouched and unaccountable.

We need to make changes in governance to all the bodies which impact on a community

Deal with these three issues properly and I believe there would be a lot more support for Mayors and that more areas would choose to both have referenda and to move to new systems. Don't deal with them and few will choose a new governance structure which they see to be adding little value and which is a massive irrelevance to us as we try to focus our attention on the day by day miseries caused to our citizens by the recession.

Malanga on Kemp:

When early American communities were deciding how to govern themselves, most opted for either the country form of government—in which groups of towns put major services in the hands of an elected county government—or they selected municipal govern-

ment, in which the power resided solely with each city or town.

I get the distinct impression from Richard Kemp's piece that many areas of Britain have chosen both regional and municipal government simultaneously, with the result of overlapping jurisdictions and responsibility for services split between councils of elected officials and bureaucratic quangos. To me this resembles the problems of certain American municipalities, the most notable of which is Los Angeles, where power is shared and often overlaps in the county and the city, and where commissions sometimes are responsible for important functions, such as overseeing the police department or public schools.

I believe that the most effective form of local government results from placing the responsibility for agencies and departments that deliver services directly under elected officials, whether they are mayors or councils. Unelected commissions (even if they are composed of commissioners appointed by elected officials) often prove least effective and most unresponsive to public demands.

A mayor who is responsible for only a small portion of local government will be as ineffective as an elected council with the same limited responsibilities. If Mr. Kemp's analysis of the issue is spot on, then clearly the local government reform effort must go deeper than merely shifting limited powers back and forth between a mayor's office and a council. It must untangle the local government structures and simplify them so that local voters know who is responsible for things when they go right—or wrong—and can hold them accountable.

Browne on Kemp

The success of the Mayor of London itself is in many ways the evidence that Mr Kemp is looking for. Although London is a special case - its sheer size makes it distinct from any other city in the UK – the need for oversight over all of the various functions is not. What makes the mayor of London a success is the clear visibility and lines

of accountability which lead directly to the mayor. People are tired of the stagnated political system, so why not ask the voters what system they would prefer?

Chapter 2
Mayors are a good idea, and here's the proof

Anthony Browne, *Policy Director, Mayor of London*

The first anniversary of Boris Johnson's election as Mayor of London was marked by a blizzard of commentary on how he had performed. Every national newspaper and most television channels indulged in it, provoking some observers to complain that the London mayoralty had almost reached the status of the presidency in the US. The Mayor of London was even acclaimed by Time magazine as one of the 100 most powerful men in the world.

Most of the judgements were favourable – Boris was doing a good job. But noticeably absent from any of the critiques was doubt that there should actually be a London mayor; Britain's finest asked questions about the serving mayor, but not the mayoralty itself. Just nine years after it was created, the London mayoralty has become a permanent fixture of the British political landscape; life without a London mayor has become almost unthinkable. Although there were plenty of doubters at the outset, no mainstream politician now moots that the post of the Mayor of London should be abolished.

Just nine years after it was created, the London mayoralty has become a permanent fixture of the British political landscape

The existence of the London mayoralty has ascended rapidly from controversy to deafening consensus because of how well it is deemed to have worked. Even fierce opponents of individual mayors agree that the post itself has transformed London politics for the better. They might not have liked individual policies, but they could see that the policy-making process was good for London, being open, accountable and reflecting the public will.

At a time when the public is becoming alarmingly disenchanted with politics, the electrifying battle between Boris Johnson and Ken Livingstone in the 2008 London election increased turnout by 10%. Boris got over one million votes, the largest personal mandate of any politician in British history, and one of the largest personal mandates of any politician in the world. This high turnout has made the mayor of London more accountable and more powerful. His every move and utterance is examined under the media microscope. Any initial concerns that it would create a local despot for London have been eradicated, because he has to justify almost everything he does.

Even though he is a local politician, he has national profile second only to the Prime Minister. Although his formal powers are limited compared to his counterpart in New York, the mayor's personal mandate gives him far more extensive informal powers. He can bring people together and make things happen in a way that a local politician without such a mandate could only dream of. The doors of cabinet ministers and of Number 10 itself are open to him in a way they wouldn't be to a council leader. When the Mayor talks, the national government listens.

There was concern when Tony Blair introduced US-style mayors that it would introduce an unwelcome style of personality politics – an obsession with individual politicians rather than policies, where flamboyance triumphs over competence. In reality, the accountability of the mayor has eradicated that risk – if he was all show and no substance, the public would soon see through him.

More significantly, it has strengthened the individual politician over the party machine, which in many parts of the country effectively deprives voters of real choice. The power of the mayor's personal mandate, and the weakness of the party machines, was shown by Ken Livingston's decision to stand as an independent in the first London mayoral election in 2000, when Labour rejected him as their candidates in preference for the utterly unimpressive Frank Dobson. The Prime Minister had decided that he didn't want Ken as London's first mayor, but the people chose differently. Not only did the mayoralty

work out so well that the Prime Minister was ultimately forced to let Ken back into the Labour fold, but it then decided in a second GLA Act to give the mayor greater powers. The new London system had proved itself a successful, accountable democracy, and it was rewarded with greater responsibility. It was coming of age.

Before the creation of the mayor, London was politically adrift – the only major city in the world without its own government. It was a stark contrast to many of the other powerful cities – such as New York, Paris or Tokyo – which not only have their own government, but a high profile mayor of national standing. But now London has a champion and spokesman commensurate with its status, giving it a sense of direction and purpose. The London Mayor, like the Mayor of New York, has a global profile, in line with their city's global standing. Without a mayor to lobby for it, London may well not have won the 2012 Olympics, and the Crossrail project would not have got off the ground.

The success of the London mayoralty illustrates well the benefits this new style of government can bring. Local government in Britain has been marred by lack of accountability and rule by mediocrity. With elected councillors choosing a council leader from their ranks it is not clear where responsibility for decisions lie, and the political process can be confusing and opaque. This alienates voters, reducing turn out, diminishing accountability, and fuelling the atrophying of the political process. The council leader system rewards party operators, rather than those who think about the interests of the public from first thing in the morning to last thing at night. Council leaders can come and go, leading to a lack of political continuity, whereas mayors have to serve out a full term.

The clear failings of local government have fuelled the centralisation of power in Britain. National governments have responded not by strengthening local government, but by clawing back powers from local government in a vicious circle that over the last thirty years has made Britain one of the most centralised countries in the developed world.

The mayoral system overcomes many of these disadvantages (and in doing so strengthens the case for devolving power). Focussing local

power in a US-style mayor makes it clear to everyone where the buck stops. By fighting to win votes directly, the mayor has to reflect the wishes of the voters rather than their party machine. By being able to appoint his team, a mayor can chose those he or she thinks best for the job, rather than having to choose from among those who have won an election as councillor. In Britain there is a general belief, drummed into us by MPs serving their own career interests in parliament, that to be democratically accountable, government must be made up of executives who are themselves elected – whether they be ministers in parliament at national level or cabinet members who are councillors at local level. But this opposition to the separation of powers between the executive and the legislature is anathema to many well functioning democracies, in particular the US. The new mayoralties in the UK are revolutionary in that they separate out the executive – the Mayor – from the legislature/assembly – the councillors – who hold the mayor to account. This should create a check and balance that is often lacking in local systems that don't have separation of powers. In a recent white paper, the Department of Communities and Local Government declared that mayors were the best form of local government.

As in London, most of the other mayoralties have transformed local politics for the better. As a recent IPPR article *Mayors Rule* details, in Middlesbrough, "Robocop" Ray Mallon cut crime by 18 percent in his first year in office, and authorities such as Hackney have dramatically improved their performance ratings after electing mayors. The election of a mascot monkey as mayor of Hartlepool was hailed by critics as proof of the drawbacks of the mayoral system, but when Stuart Drummond threw off his monkey costume and started taking the job seriously, he made a big impact on crime and education, and was rewarded with re-election with a massively increased majority. There is a growing body of evidence that links mayors with economic growth and regeneration.

The new mayoralties have generally improved the working of democracy. A study by the University of Manchester, Salford Univer-

sity, and Goldsmith's College entitled the *New Council Constitutions*, drew on surveys across the country to find that the new arrangements had lead to "more visible and effective leadership", and had "enhanced democratic legitimacy of local government." At a time when local democracy is in apparently terminal decline, this is a remarkable achievement. The study found that giving more power to the leader resulted in better council performance, and that public satisfaction levels with councils is strongest where the leadership is stable and not subject to change, as is more the case with mayors than traditional council leaders. The public are alienated from politics when their leaders (whether at local level or national) get changed without them even being consulted on it – a strength of the mayoral system is that it is clearly up to the public, not the political activists, to decide who the leader is. Other surveys have shown that public recognition of mayors is far higher than of mere council leaders, increasing accountability and engagement with politics.

But although individual mayoralties in London and elsewhere have been successful, the same cannot be said for the mayoral movement – the idea has singularly failed to catch on. After his election victory in 1997, Tony Blair hoped that introducing US-style mayors would make Britain's dysfunctional local government functional again. But more than a decade later, it is clear that the experiment hasn't worked. The idea hasn't gained traction with the British public, who have generally said no to new mayors when asked. Since the Local Government Act 2000, there have been 36 referendums to create a mayor, and only one third of those were passed. Out of the 410 local authorities in England and Wales, the Act has resulted in just 12 directly-elected mayors (the London mayor was actually created by a different Act, and is technically not part of the local authority system). Nor have the new mayors been in the major conurbations. Mr Blair envisaged his mayors would inject life into cities such as Birmingham and Manchester, but they have been in lower profile locations, from Watford to Hartlepool.

But the failure of the mayoral vision to win over the British public, and to rescue local government across the country, has more to do

with the half-baked implementation of the scheme than the way that the mayoralties have performed.

The problems that the mayoralties have had in Britain is partly that - apart from the former prime minister Tony Blair - they lacked a sufficiently energetically champion in local government. John Prescott, when in charge of local government in the cabinet, was notably lukewarm about taking them forward. But more significantly, the new mayoral system was a revolution imposed from above that met resistance from established interests. It was a way to transfer power from the political class to the people, but the political class fought back. Under a mayoral system, councillors lose a lot of their power, and are reduced from being part of the executive to holding the executive to account. People who make adequate councillors, and survive in a system that rewards political insiders, knew they had no chance of being elected as mayor, and so would lose status in the new system. Councillors therefore overwhelmingly opposed the creation of mayors, fighting against local referendums, or urging a "no vote" if they were forced to have one. Under the legislation, a referendum to elect a mayor can only be triggered either by a majority vote from councillors or a petition signed by five per cent of constituents. With the local political class fighting any change, it is no surprise that there have been so few referendums, or that so many of those have resulted in a no vote. The London mayor would probably never have come to being if there had been an equivalent London political class to resist it, but after the abolition of the Greater London Council, there simply wasn't – it was easier to create the London mayoralty because it was filling a void.

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Once created, mayoralties can attract high quality candidates that would simply be throttled by the old comfortable collegiate system of local politics. Ray Mallon in Middlesbrough and Boris Johnson in

London (and indeed Michael Bloomberg in New York), would never have been able to make the contributions they have without a mayoral system. But before mayoralties are created, these would-be mayors are generally outside the local political process, and so in no position to campaign for them, and certainly no match for an established political class resisting change.

The answer to the triumph of local vested interests over the public interest is not to stop the process of change, but to reinvigorate it. The best way to do that is not to impose mayors against the wishes of the local population, but to reduce the ability of local councillors to resist change. That is what would be achieved by the Conservative Party's policy of holding referendums on mayors in the 12 biggest cities. If those twelve follow the path of London, then there is a strong case for rolling out mayoral referendums across the country, giving every voter in Britain the chance to say whether they would prefer live under a mayor or a council leader. Only then will the mayoral revolution really take off, rescuing British local politics from its long malaise.

Malanga on Browne:

To someone from America, the most provocative statement in Anthony Browne's long and fascinating history of the debate on mayors in the U.K. is this: "Tony Blair hoped that introducing US-style mayors would make Britain's dysfunctional local government functional again."

Do British citizens widely believe local government is dysfunctional? In the United States, the opposite is true. Surveys consistently show that people believe their own local elected officials to be the most effective of government representatives. By contrast, we are typically most disenchanted with the federal government—regardless of which party is in power. Some of this derives from the wariness our founders had of federalism. They believed that government which is closest to the people generally *governs best (with some powerful exceptions over the years, of*

course). This may be one reason why local elections, from mayoral races to council voting, are often hotly contested and more controversial than our federal congressional and U.S. Senate races.

If British citizens do truly believe local government is not functioning well, it is good that they are having this debate about the role that a mayor's office might play. I doubt you will come to one conclusion about how to proceed that satisfies every city, town and village, but the debate itself will no doubt improve municipal governance by focusing more attention on it.

Kemp on Browne:

There is no recognition here that London is a special case. Even when there was a GLC the Leader of the GLC was probably the best known local politician in the UK because of the size of the authority; the adjacency to the media and its metro-centric ways; and its adjacency to Parliamentary Leadership. There is no other London in the Country (Praise the Lord!) and the article does not answer what London is in governance terms - a region, a conurbation or a City - or all three.

Chapter 3
Lessons from the US: Let the voters decide

Steve Malanga, *City Journal*

In the late 19th century, political machines like Tammany Hall in New York governed many American cities. These powerful organizations, based on a patronage system which rewarded local political operatives for their support, reached from the pinnacle of power in city hall down to neighbourhood political clubs. They effectively controlled most municipal functions, from the police department to sanitation to public works.

What worked for these political machines, however, didn't necessarily work for the citizens of their cities, and a strong urban reform movement took shape in America to clean up municipal government. Led by figures like Teddy Roosevelt, who served as Police Commissioner of New York City five years before being elected President, the Progressive Reform movement attempted to instil professional efficiency and nonpartisan management into local governments. These reformers championed a type of government in which impartial city managers replaced mayors. The reformers also revamped the election process so that candidates could no longer run for office as members of a political party or local machine, but were instead identified on ballots only by name. Today, slightly more than half of all American cities are managed by some version of the reform government inspired by the Progressive movement. Many of America's newest cities, that is, cities in the Southwest and West that were founded in the 20th century, have adopted some form of city-council/city manager government in which an elected council appoints a nonpartisan mayor or manager to run the city.

But the rest of American cities, including many of the largest and oldest, continue to be governed by a directly-elected mayor whose

powers are separate from that of the local city council. In short, after a century, America still hasn't decided exactly which form of government it prefers for its cities. Mostly that's because America's cities are so different from one another that what suits one doesn't necessarily work for the other. There is no federal prescription for how to govern locally in America, and most Americans seem to like it that way.

If there is a trend, however, it is that newer cities and smaller ones have tended toward the city-manager approach, while older and larger cities have mostly retained the structure of an independently elected mayor. In large part this is because bigger cities have found that the issues they faces tend to require the services of a strong mayor who can be a civic cheerleader and make decisions based on partisan, or ideological, choices.

One way of illustrating this is to examine a favourite formulation of former New York City Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, who governed from 1934 to 1945. LaGuardia saw himself as a Progressive Reformer who wanted to bring professional management and a nonpartisan brand of government to New York, still largely run by Tammany Hall at that point. One of his favourite sayings was, "There is no Republican or Democratic way to pick up the garbage," by which he meant that there is no ideology underlying the delivery of the basic services that municipal government provides.

Newer cities and smaller ones have tended toward the city-manager approach, while older and larger cities have mostly retained the structure of an independently elected mayor

But time has exposed LaGuardia's notion as somewhat naïve and unsophisticated, even in something as basic as the collection of garbage. Across America, Republican mayors and some moderate Democrats have controversially privatized sanitation services in big cities, in the process shrinking the public sector work force and cutting costs. But other mayors have steadfastly clung to a

unionized, public-sector sanitation workforce largely because they view competition as undermining the standard of living of blue-collar government workers. Thus, even sanitation services can be partisan. So are larger issues, from reform of local education to methods of policing to delivery of social services. These are hardly subjects that a governing commission or bureaucrat-manager can decide easily in a place like Chicago or New York. Instead, large cities rely on the presence of a popularly elected mayor to tackle such controversial matters.

New York City is an example of the way in which such a mayor with broad powers can govern. The reforms that the city initiated first under Rudolph Giuliani and later under Michael Bloomberg are examples of how a strong mayoralty can help transform a city.

New York's mayor has imposing powers. He commands a budget of nearly $60 billion, which I believe is the largest municipal budget directly under a mayor's control in the world. The mayor also has broad discretion in selecting city officials. He chooses his entire cabinet of city administrators—from the police commissioner to the head of the board of education to the director of the city's social services—at his own discretion, without any confirmation votes by the city council or any other body. Meanwhile, the city, which has sometimes been compared to an ancient Greek city-state in the powers that it assumes for itself, controls its own public assistance programs and has its own university system. Its police force, the largest force in the country, has its own intelligence gathering unit that operates worldwide, independent of federal operations like the Central Intelligence Agency and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Giuliani used the powers of the office and his electoral mandate to quickly make changes in the city when he assumed office in 1994. Most importantly, he selected his own police commissioner, William Bratton, who instituted an entirely new policing regime in New York City which focused on quality-of-life crimes—a controversial move that was heavily backed by Giuliani himself. Bratton

made sweeping changes in the police force, including instituting an entirely new management structure, revamping whole departments, and replacing a quarter of all precinct commanders in a short time. Those changes underlie the city's dramatic and quick results fighting crime. Violent offenses declined 10 percent Giuliani's first year in office, 13 percent his second year, and 14 percent his third year in office (ultimately declining by about two-thirds over his two terms).

A powerful mayor can actually impel national reforms in the United States. Public assistance is one area where that happened. In America, the states share responsibility for administering public assistance with the federal government, and New York State has given New York City responsibility for administering public assistance within its border. When Giuliani took office, about 1.1 million New Yorkers were on public assistance, constituting about 15 percent of the population. Many had been on public assistance for decades, and the city had no requirements that those getting help from the government seek work. Giuliani quickly changed the administration of public assistance in New York, instituting welfare-to-work strategies which compelled able-bodied adults to seek jobs. Welfare rolls fell under Giuliani by about 60 percent. More important, however, is that the city's welfare reform efforts became one of the models used by Congress in designing federal welfare reform, which came three years after Giuliani instituted his changes to the system.

Other cities with strong mayors have also helped set the national agenda. In local education, Milwaukee's mayor during much of the 1990s, Democrat John Norquist, became an advocate for reforming school systems by allowing parents to have more choices about where to send their kids. Working with the governor of his state, Republican Tommy Thompson of Wisconsin, Norquist helped to institute vouchers in Milwaukee and lobbied for other changes. The school reform movement, most especially the establishment of a range of choices for inner city parents, spread out from places like Wisconsin to other states during the 1990s.

Some mayors in America have become engines of change precisely because these mayors can claim a voters' mandate. In the mid-1990s, parents in Chicago were frankly disgusted with the performance of the local schools. But the mayor, Democrat Richard Daly, could not do much to change the system because he did not have control over appointing the superintendent of schools. Still, Daly was able to use popular outrage to lead a movement in the Illinois state legislature to give direct control, and therefore accountability, for the school system to the office of the mayor. When Daly achieved that goal he installed a powerful school reformer as Chicago's superintendent who made sweeping reforms, including closing down failing schools, instituting charter schools as alternatives for city kids, and installing new, scientifically-supported curricula. Years of inaction were supplanted by quick reforms once the mayor's office became accountable to city residents for the shape of the school system.

But large cities can also find reform difficult without a strong mayoralty. One example of that situation is Los Angeles, which is America's second largest city and which blends elements of the Progressive agenda into its municipal governance. Los Angeles elects its mayor through nonpartisan voting and invests its mayor with only a minimum of powers compared to other major cities. Commissioners and boards tend to wield much of the other power. Although Los Angeles has 3.8 million citizens, or 48 percent of New York's population, the Los Angeles mayor controls a budget of just $7 billion. He does not select his own police commissioner, and his police force shares jurisdiction in Los Angeles with a county force. Nor can the Los Angeles mayor select the head of the local school system, which is under county control. He also has little influence over social welfare programs.

These limitations have made the Los Angeles mayor into a sometimes bystander, or mere advocate, compared to mayors in places like New York, Chicago or Milwaukee. The city's police department, plagued by corruption and clashes with citizens, including

the ill-fated Rodney King incident that led to six days of rioting in 1992, has often become a battle ground between police commissioners (who are appointed by an independent commission) and the mayor's office. Sometimes mayors have so violently disagreed with the selection of a candidate to run the department that they have worked to undermine his authority through public criticism. One result has been a department that was demoralized for years after the King incident and eventually taken over by a federal monitor. Finally in 2002, with citizen complaints about newly rising crime reaching a crescendo, Los Angeles' police commission did what Giuliani was able to do himself nearly a decade earlier; they hired Bratton to bring the same data-based policing methods and management structure to the LAPD that he had brought to New York.

Of course, those who believe that government often creates as many problems as it solves would observe that a strong mayor with a forceful agenda can be an agent for the wrong kind of change, too

The situation is similar in public education, which is controlled by the county in Los Angeles. The school system there performs poorly, with high school graduation rates low and stagnant. Yet although the current mayor, Antonio Villaraigosa, is intensely familiar with the problems because he once served as a delegate for the local teachers' union, his efforts at reform have been blocked. As a result, Villaraigosa has been reduced to forming a private committee, the Partnership for Los Angeles Schools, to lobby and pressure the board of education by electing reform-minded members to the board. After four years in office, Villaraigosa is still battling just to bring reformers into the system. Results will have to wait.

Of course, those who believe that government often creates as many problems as it solves would observe that a strong mayor with a forceful agenda can be an agent for the wrong kind of change, too. New York City found that out in the late 1960s when it elected a charismatic congressman, John Lindsay, as mayor. With aspira-

tions for national office, Lindsay wanted to make New York a model of the new American city in the Civil Rights era, where city government worked to uplift the poor by vastly expanding social welfare programs. To do so he rapidly raised taxes and shifted spending into social programs. The results were catastrophic: a declining economy, fleeing businesses, shrinking municipal services and a doubling of the rolls of those on public assistance. The fiscal crisis his actions provoked drove the city to the edge of bankruptcy.

But under such a governance system, voters also know whom to blame. After the searing experience of near-bankruptcy, New Yorkers elected a strong fiscal reformer, Ed Koch, as mayor. The tough-minded Koch used the powers of the office to instil a new budget discipline into the city and led it through the boom years of the mid-1980s.

Perhaps in the end that is the best way to judge which system is best—by putting the question to the voters. In many cases they have responded by selecting what they consider to be the best attributes of each system, so that in America today there is now a blending of what was once two distinct forms of municipal governance—the strong mayoral system and the nonpartisan city-manager/commission system. This has particularly been true in mid-sized American cities, because municipalities of this size can often see the benefits of both types of municipal governance.

The clearest message in the US seems to be that in the absence of a one-size-fits all solution, US cities have decided to let the voters choose.

For instance, some cities governed by an elected commission or council have switched to direct elections of mayors by the voters because they found that a city manager was not a suitable civic cheerleader. Other cities which have strong mayoralties, like Chicago, have added the role of chief municipal administrative operating officer, the equivalent of a city manager, to their gov-

erning structure to free the mayor to focus on policy and political issues.

Voters have weighed in on many issues regarding municipal governance, especially what kinds of elections they prefer. New York City voters overwhelmingly rejected a 2003 referendum to switch the city to nonpartisan mayoral elections—in which all candidates would run without party affiliation. A move to enact nonpartisan voting in Chicago's mayoral race also died in the early 1990s when minority voters and elected officials in the city expressed concern that such a move would weaken the chances of African American candidates by eliminating party primaries, where minority voters often had an edge.

The clearest message in the US seems to be that in the absence of a one-size-fits all solution, US cities have decided to let the voters choose.

Browne on Malanga

I agree that putting the question to the voters is by far the best method of assessing whether or not Mayors are needed or even appropriate for different areas. There is no reason why different types of mayoralty should not emerge in different areas - in fact it could be a good driver for improvement and the evolution of the Mayoral system. Whilst the US has a good record on putting the question to the voters, what is important in the UK is that the current political elite cannot block demands for change without sufficient cause. This is the real challenge to reform for us.

Kemp on Malanga

This piece has two flaws. Firstly a fatal confusion between running and leading. In our system neither mayors nor Leaders run our councils. We lead them. We set direction and targets and

are responsible for community leadership and then monitor delivery. Delivery is effected by a professional team led by the Chief Executive. I believe that separation is right. Electing managers is not a good idea. Secondly, letting the voters choose which system sounds good, but is unlikely to happen. In 29 years as a councillor I have never been asked or challenged about structures. People just want their services delivered and expect us to sort things out.

About the Authors

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A former national journalist, Anthony Browne was Director of the leading think tank Policy Exchange, and has written reports on issues ranging from the NHS to housing, education, environment and welfare reform for several think tanks. Anthony has a degree in mathematics from Cambridge University. His current role is to provide policy advice to the Mayor, and to research and develop new policies for London. Anthony is a former board member of Localis.

Richard Kemp
Cllr Richard Kemp has been a member of Liverpool City Council for 25 years. He has served as Chair of Housing, Education and Finance and was most recently the Executive Member for Housing, Neighbourhoods & Community safety. Richard is now the Leader of the Liberal Democrats at the Local Government Association, where he is also the portfolio holder for European and International Affairs. He is also a member of the Housing and Communities Advisory Board at the Audit Commission.

Steve Malanga
Steve Malanga is City Journal Senior Editor, a Manhattan Institute Senior Fellow and a RealClearMarkets.com columnist. He writes about the intersection of urban economies, business communities and public policy. Prior to joining City Journal, Steve was executive editor of Crain's New York Business for seven years. In 1995, he was a finalist for a Gerald Loeb Award for Excellence in Financial Journalism, and has also written articles on various topics for The Wall Street Journal, New York Daily News, New York Post, and other publications.

Tom Shakespeare
Tom joined Localis in June 2008, having previously worked for Policy Exchange where he contributed to a report on party financing called 'Paying for the Party'. He graduated in both Mechanical Engineering (BEng) and Politics (MA) at the University of Nottingham in 2007. His final year dissertation looked into the potential application of the second law of thermodynamics to agent-based models of human action and ethnic conflict. Tom leads on research for Localis, and amongst other things, has written several reports, including 'Information, Information, Information' and 'The Future of Regional Governance'.

Directly Elected Mayors

Are they appropriate for all major UK cities?

There is currently a growing debate in respect to the value of a having directly elected mayor in every major city. This has largely been prompted by the success generated in London since 2000 from having an elected mayor. However, other places around the country have seen mixed results as a result of these mayors, and therefore debate remains rife about whether or not there is a case for extending this model across the country.

In this first publication of its type for Localis, this issue is debated between an advocate of mayors (Anthony Browne – Director of Policy, Mayor of London) and a Councillor who is skeptical about their value (Richard Kemp, Leader of the Liberal Democrat group on the LGA). The final article, by Steve Malanga of the City Journal in the US, takes an international perspective and shows us that the debate about local accountability is not unique to the UK.

These essays provide a real insight into the current thinking on the future of mayors and local government. The essays here are punchy and persuasive, yet despite the strong differences of opinion, we can begin to see the potential for some kind of consensus for the future.

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