County and Districts / City Devolution proposals: Gap Analysis

(Assessed using Robin Hambleton's Governance Criteria)

This assessment has focused on the devolution governance criteria suggested by Professor Robin Hambleton in his recent presentation to OCS. It does not revisit the essentially 'financial efficiency' assessments provided by the consultants to the Districts / City and the County. The intention is to broaden the debate on devolution (or governance reform) to include additional essential aspects of governance. The demand for governance reform includes the following:

- **Economic -** economic growth could be accelerated if the county (in whatever governance configuration) is less dependent on centralised funding. Devolution can enable localities to respond dynamically to the needs and opportunities of their economies.
- **Social -** devolution might lead to the development of more effective ways of tackling social challenges – for example, growing inequality, inadequate housing supply and issues relating to health, education and public safety. Devolution will, by integrating separate services more effectively, and by combining the efforts of the public, private and non-profit sector, enable a range of pressing social issues to be addressed in a more cost-effective way.
- **Environmental -** devolution can play a vital role in promoting sustainable development and the creation of more sustainable patterns of living. Devolution should promote sound spatial planning of city regions and a more coordinated approach to, for example, transport planning and urban growth management. Critically, devolution should foster policies specifically aligned with global, national and local emissions-reduction targets, and which recognise the imperative of responding to the likely effects of climate change.
- **Democratic –** devolution can bring government closer to the people, strengthen civic engagement and revitalise local democracy. Devolution should increase public involvement in local affairs and enliven local democracy.

The assessment also takes into account the government's response to the recent DCLG Select Committee[1] devolution report and in particular:

- *"The Government's key aim through this agenda is to support local places to identify and achieve their own objectives ….*
- *…. it is important to recognise that this iterative, bottom up approach to devolution has allowed for rapid progress in ensuring that devolution to local areas, and the creation of stronger local governance across functional economic areas, becomes a tangible reality ….*
- *…. the Government is clear that deals should be bottom-up, bespoke and place-led, in terms of the specific measures agreed but also in the way in which those measures are implemented locally ….*
- *…. inevitably, pioneering new measures carries greater challenges than implementing measures where there is a precedent, and both Government and places must rise to these challenges. In particular, this places even greater emphasis on the quality of the evidence base, business case and evaluation framework underpinning proposals ….*
- *…. the Government considers that the broad, enabling framework set out by the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act provides a good basis for the devolution agenda to continue to evolve over time. The Government's commitment to the ongoing devolution of substantial powers, including where these*

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[1] Government Response to CLG Select Committee Report: "Devolution: the next five years and beyond" Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government by Command of Her Majesty, May 2016

touch on fiscal levers, is most notably demonstrated by the plans announced in October 2015 to move to 100% business rates retention within local government ….

- *…. the Government supports further exploration of health devolution to local areas and agrees with the Committee that devolution, in the right circumstances, has great potential to achieve considerable benefits for health and social care, including further support to progress towards better integration ….*

The following matrices attempt to assess the extent to which these demands for change are being met in the proposals of the Districts / City and the County. The purpose of the assessment is to enhance the current debate and to offer constructive suggestions for governance reform which meets the demands.

Districts and City Recommendation

The proposal is for three unitary authorities (UA) responsible and accountable for all local government services in their area. The three UAs proposed are:

- Northern Oxfordshire (the current Cherwell and West Oxfordshire District Councils)
- Oxford City (the current Oxford City Council)
- Southern Oxfordshire (the current South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils)

In addition, a Combined Authority (CA) would be established as a statutory collaborative vehicle for leaders of the district unitary authorities to work in partnership with the LEP and CCG to manage services that need to be coordinated over a wider area, drive transformation and deliver the devolution deal.

The combined authority would provide the NHS (through the CCG), business representatives (through the LEP) a seat at the table with voting rights, giving them a voice in the decisions. This would create, a single strategic partnership body committed to tackling the big challenges facing Oxfordshire.

County (Option 6) Recommendation

- A strategic Unitary Council for Oxfordshire with overall responsibility for determining a framework of delegation of powers and budgets
- The strategic unitary body would retain responsibility for decisions affecting Oxfordshire as a whole, including infrastructure, transport and housing. It would also determine policy for adult social care and public health services, integration of services with health partners, and children's services – meeting need and determining the allocation of resources across the County.
- Constitutionally established Area Boards reflecting the administrative boundaries of the current City and District Councils exercising these delegated powers and budgets
- A commitment to explore further enhancements to the roles of Town and Parish Councils.

We are suggesting a subjective rating of how far a proposal contributes to satisfying a criterion **C**ontributes [C-, C, C+] or **S**ubstantially **C**ontributes [SC]. Delivers [D] is also available, but not used thus far!

Analysis of the Five Districts + County + Combined Authority+ elected Mayor Proposal						
Criteria suggested by Prof Robin Hambleton	Weight	Score	Comments	Rating	What more is needed?	
Civic leadership *Does the proposed governance model provide for effective leadership - which includes the capacity to develop a vision for an area coupled with a governance arrangement that can ensure effective and accountable delivery of this vision*						
Considered judgement (effective decision making) • *Does the proposed governance model support high quality decision-making processes that go beyond discovering the preferences of various stakeholders?* • *The importance of creating sound arrangements for the development of deliberative local democracy is essential*						

Criteria	Weight	Score	Comments	Rating	What more is needed?
Transparency and efficiency *Does the governance model make it clear (to other councillors, professionals and the public at large) who is making decisions, on what issues, when, why and how?* *Transparency is fundamental not only in building trust and confidence in the political process, but also in ensuring efficiency.*					
Accountability and legitimacy *Does the governance model ensure that decision-makers are held to account?* *More specifically, are sound arrangements in place to ensure that there is effective scrutiny of decision-making by those seeking to hold the executive to account (non-executives, the public, other parties)?*					

Criteria	Weight	Score	Comments	Rating	What more is needed?
Inclusive public involvement *Does the governance model provide for effective public involvement in decision-making?* *The creation of a devolved governance structure should ensure that there is proper public debate about important public policy choices.* *Do the processes of decision-making ensure the inclusion of citizen voices?*					
Inclusive business involvement *Does the model provide for the effective involvement of local business interests?* *What role will local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) play in governance arrangements?* *How will the authority assist local businesses?*					

Analysis of the Single Unitary + Area Boards Proposal					
Criteria suggested by Prof Robin Hambleton	Weight	Score	**Comments**	Rating	**What more is needed?**
Civic leadership *Does the proposed governance model provide for effective leadership - which includes the capacity to develop a vision for an area coupled with a governance arrangement that can ensure effective and accountable delivery of this vision*					
Considered judgement (effective decision making) • *Does the proposed governance model support high quality decision-making processes that go beyond discovering the preferences of various stakeholders?* *The importance of creating sound arrangements for the development of deliberative local democracy is essential*					

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Other possible criteria

Relevance Overall relevance of governance arrangements to expected outcomes and impact. This would take into account consistency with the national and sub-national development priorities			
Effectiveness The extent to which the development outcomes for Oxfordshire are expected to be achieved.			