



policy briefing

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Additional powers and responsibilities for the Mayor & London Assembly

July 2006

INTRODUCTION

Part of new Labour's democratic renewal programme was the creation of the Greater London Authority (GLA), comprising the Mayor of London and London Assembly, and the gradual devolution of powers from Whitehall to City Hall. In 2000, Londoners elected their first Mayor and Assembly, and in November 2005 the Government consulted on proposals to grant the GLA additional powers. In July 2006, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) published the final package of proposals, taking into consideration the 337 responses they received during the consultation process. ROTA contributed to the debate by consulting with its membership of black and minority ethnic (BME) London organisations and feeding into review events held by the ODPM on 30 October 2005 and 16 January 2006. It also attended an event held by the London School of Economics on 26 October 2005 and fed into the response by the London Voluntary Service Council (LVSC).

The purpose of this briefing is to inform you about the government's final proposals as these are presented in the DCLG's policy statement published in July 2006*. These proposals are soon to be introduced into a GLA Bill. We will also give you a brief critical analysis of some of these proposals which are expected to change the way strategic thinking is developed and delivered in the capital, and reflect on their implications for the BME voluntary and community sector (VCS).

What are the new powers of the Mayor and Assembly?

The devolution and transfer of powers focuses on the four main areas of housing, learning and skills, planning and waste.

- Housing

The London Housing Board's responsibilities will transfer to the Mayor, who will be responsible for a statutory Housing Strategy for London and a strategic Housing Investment

Plan. The Mayor will also decide the broad distribution of affordable housing part of the Regional Housing Pot.

- Learning and skills

There will be a new London Skills and Employment Board chaired by the Mayor and attended by London's key business leaders. The Mayor will be responsible for a new Adult Skills Strategy for London. This will set out the priorities for the new Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for London, which will sit within the national LSC structure.

- Planning

The Mayor will have a stronger say on whether draft local development plans are in general conformity with his London Plan and will be able to direct changes to Borough's programmes for the local development plans they produce. Furthermore, he will have the discretion to determine planning applications of strategic importance.

- Waste

There will be a new London-wide Waste and Recycling Forum, which will administer the new London Waste and Recycling Fund. There will also be a dedicated London Waste Infrastructure Development Programme led by Defra and GLA. In addition, waste authorities will be required to deliver their functions in general conformity with the Mayor's Municipal Waste Management Strategy.

- Culture & sport, public health, energy, climate change & water

In addition to the aforementioned powers, the Mayor will have a stronger role in culture and sport, public health, energy, climate change and water. For instance, the Mayor will appoint the Chairs and some board members of the Arts Council England, London, and consult with arts, sports and other cultural delivery bodies in the development of a London cultural strategy. The Mayor will promote the reduction of health inequalities in London and prepare a strategy to tackle them.

COMMENTARY

ROTA welcomes the proposals and the transfer of the aforementioned powers from central government to GLA. When moving from the legislative to the implementation phase, the GLA will need to remain a focused and strategic authority, maintaining an appropriate balance between central government, the regional tier and local authorities. The 2003 Mid Year Estimates (MYE) showed that 7,387,900 people are living in London, with more than 3 million belonging to BME groups. While implementing the new recommendations, the views of BME people will need to be considered thoroughly.

Housing

The consultation process showed that a great number of BME groups, trade unions and bodies from the housing sector were in favour of extended powers in relation to housing i.e. for the Mayor to be able to make decisions on the Regional Housing Pot and set the direction of the Housing Corporation's investment programme. ROTA would like to see explicit indications as to how the empowered Mayor will tackle the rising numbers of homeless people from

refugee and other BME communities. With the introduction of new powers that will allow the Mayor to exert direct control over housing investment and planning, this is the opportunity for the development and implementation of a holistic, pan-London housing plan. As stated in the GLA's 2005 housing evidence-based strategy, the net total of additional dwellings required over the next 10 years indicates that 353,000 new homes will need to be provided. That is approximately 35,000 per annum.

Learning and skills

With 80% of new employers in London set to come from BME backgrounds according to the London Plan, and a continuing disparity in employment outcomes, there needs to be a greater emphasis on what the capital's diverse population needs. In addition, the proposals do not make explicit how the LSC will link to the London Development Agency (LDA), the Mayor's agency for business and jobs. ROTA would like to see how that relationship will develop and how it will influence BME communities and the VCS. Regional priorities should include targeting discrepancies in learning and employment outcomes for London's BME and refugee communities. ROTA would expect to see BME and VCS representation on the Learning and Skills Board particularly since there is evidence that people from BME groups are likely to be unemployed. The 2001 census showed that the unemployment rate for inner London is 8.9% and for Greater London 6.7%. 6.2% and 5.0% respectively are White British and 15.1% and 11.3% are BME people.

The contribution of the VCS is significant for the economy and reduction of unemployment rates. Research for the London Regional ChangeUp Consortium on mapping London VCS networks** found over 200 regional and sub-regional networks in London. Half are specialist sector networks that are not well connected to generic infrastructure. Better cooperation between the LDA and the BME VCS could help address some of these issues. According to the latest LVSC statistics, there are over 40,000 VCS organisations in London, and over 200,000 people were employed within the sector. There are three million volunteers - equivalent to an additional 1.3 million full time jobs. Volunteers' contribution is valued at over £15 billion. Finally, the VCS employs higher proportions of part-time workers, people from black and ethnic minority communities and women, people with long-term illness or disability and graduates.

Culture & sport, public health, energy, climate change & water

In terms of health inequalities, considerable numbers of documents have captured the tensions that exist between the Black community, carers, patients and the mental health system***. Since the Acheson Inquiry which noted that ethnic origin was "not routinely recorded in the NHS" progress has been made, but factors such as economic disadvantage and poverty, racism and discrimination, lack of social support and access to quality public services continue to influence the health of London's BME communities****. ROTA would like to see a strong relationship between the GLA and the Strategic Health Authority for London. We sit on the London Health Commission BME sub-group, and we hope that the empowered Mayor will work closely with this body as well as other BME VCS bodies to ensure representation.

The GLA/ LDA will play a leading role in the operation of the European programmes in London. This is a positive development. However, according to the UK Secretariat of the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia more should be done to improve access to EU funding for organisations working on race equality issues and for BME organisations. Claude Moraes MEP said in his report to the European Parliament “I am well aware of the constant struggle some BME organisations face in securing funding and more importantly maintaining funding for their work ... European funding ... is fraught with difficulties. These include lack of designated funding for race equality work and/ or BME led organisations and small organisations, over representations of state bodies and lack of availability of smaller, non-transitional grants ...”**** ROTA would expect the GLA to take this into account and respond adequately.

In addition, as noted in the Mayor’s Commission on African and Asian Heritage report ‘Delivering Shared Heritage’, London’s culturally and ethnically diverse population is still to be reflected in the heritage sector’s actions and thinking. As the capital’s regional strategic authority, the GLA is given the opportunity to input into the development of London cultural bodies’ strategies. These bodies should be encouraged to work closer with the BME sector in order to increase inclusion and tackle inequality.

CONCLUSION

The issues outlined in the commentary are not meant to be exhaustive, but rather indicative of the new challenges the empowered Mayor will have to face. Ken Livingston may not have got the independent city he claimed to have wanted, but he has received considerable additional powers to continue making London a better place for *all* its residents. He said: “The additional powers granted to the office of the Mayor will enable us to tackle the problems of London head on”. ROTA’s role as a leading social policy think-tank devoted to issues that affect BME communities in London is to ensure BME representation in the development of policy. We are committed to working towards achieving social justice and the elimination of discrimination and promoting human rights, diversity, equality of opportunity and best practice. We will continue to contribute to the debate by consulting with our members of BME London organisations and inform London’s strategic decision-makers about issues affecting the BME voluntary sector and the communities it serves and by making government policy more accessible to London’s BME organisations.

* DCLG (2006) *The GLA: The Government’s final proposals for Additional Powers and Responsibilities for the Mayor of and Assembly*.

** Black Health Workers and Patient Group (1980); Keating (2002).

***. Black Health Workers and Patient Group (1980); Keating (2002).

**** London Health Commission (2004) *Focus – ethnicity and health in London*.

*****Claude Moraes (2004) “EU funding for London-based organisations” *European Lookout*, Issue 8.

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