

Minute PR147/01 refers.

NORTH WEST CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

SHOULD A REGIONAL GOVERNMENT FOR THE NORTH WEST BE ESTABLISHED?

CONSULTATION PROGRAMME

- 7TH SEPTEMBER - BLACKPOOL TOWN HALL 6.30pm (tea and coffee from 5.30pm)

THEME: Would a North West Regional Government promote tourism more effectively in the region.

- 14th SEPTEMBER - WARRINGTON - Wilson Patton Suite, PATTON ARMS 6.30 (tea and coffee from 6pm)
(Parker Street - opposite the railway station)

Theme: Would a regional government in the North West increase economic development in the region?

- 21st SEPTEMBER - CROWN AND MITRE HOTEL, CARLISLE 6.30PM (tea and coffee from 5.30pm)

THEME: Would a North West Regional Government have dealt more effectively with the foot and mouth crisis?

**PLEASE ATTEND AND LET THE CONVENTION
HAVE YOUR VIEWS**

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INFORMATION ABOUT REGIONAL GOVERNMENT
THEN VISIT OUR WEB SITE www.nwra.gov.uk/concon**

CARLISLE CITY COUNCIL

Report to:- Chairman and Members of Policy & Resources Committee
Date of Meeting:- 29th August 2001 Agenda Item No:-

Public	Operational	Delegated: No
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Accompanying Comments and Statements	Required	Included
Environmental Impact Statement:	No	
Corporate Management Team Comments:	No	
City Treasurers Comments:	No	
City Solicitor & Secretary Comments:	No	
Head of Personnel Services Comments:	No	

Title:- NORTH WEST CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION
Report of:- TOWN CLERK AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE
Report reference:- TC 175/01

Summary:-

The North West Regional Association are currently raising the profile of the North West Constitutional Convention (NWCC). The Convention, which was set up to promote regional government in the north west, are asking Local Authorities to formally consider their position. This report provides some background information to enable Members to consider the position.

Recommendation

1. That the City Council considers a formal response to the North West Constitutional Conventions findings and proposals.

Peter Stybelski
Town Clerk & Chief Executive

Officer Contact
Jim White 7017

Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers: None

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The North West Regional Association (NWRA) established the NWCC in July 1999 with the remit of providing a focus for regional government in the North West. The Convention published a report, *New Way Forward - No Way Back* (a summary is attached and a full copy of the report has been placed in the Members Room) outlining the case for regional government in the north west and summary of the findings are attached. It may be helpful to note the general background to proposals for regional government.
- Following the 1997 General Election the Government committed itself to elected regional government for those areas of England that wanted it, but set no timetable. The Government proposed that these new bodies would be introduced only where people voted for them in referendums.
 - The government has created several regional bodies, including the Greater London Authority, the eight regional development agencies and regional assemblies to scrutinise the agencies.
 - The Government have confirmed a budget of £15m over 3 years to help the development of Chambers in the English Regions.
 - Following the 2001 General Election there was no mention in the Queen's speech of relevant enabling legislation.

2. New Way Forward – No Way Back”

- 2.1. The NWCC report “*New Way Forward - No Way Back*” recommends, subject to consultation with the people of the North West, that:
1. A referendum question be framed to establish whether there is popular support for a form of regional government in the North West.
 2. That when a referendum is put to the people of the North West the enabling legislation should be speedily put to the Westminster Parliament, setting out the size, powers and administration of the body.
- 2.2. The NWCC stresses in its documentation that their proposals are about drawing down powers from Whitehall rather than taking away powers from local government.
- 2.3. The NWCC believes that regional government will become a key issue for the north west and is keen to bring the issue to the attention of as many people and organisations as possible. The Convention has in place a programme of consultation events organised on a sub regional basis (a copy of the programme is also attached). As part of that programme a consultation meeting is being arranged by the NWCC in Carlisle on Friday 21st September at 6:30 p.m. (venue to be confirmed).

2.4. Published documentation can be found on the Convention's web site www.nwra.gov.uk/concon where views on the proposals can also be expressed.

2.5. The Convention are seeking a formal response from the City Council to their findings and proposals for regional government in the north west.

Recommendation

1. That the City Council considers a formal response to the North West Constitutional Conventions findings and proposals.

Peter Stebelski

Town Clerk & Chief Executive

Executive Summary

*Shape of regional government (Chapter 4)

We find that:

-existing regional bodies such as the Government Office for the North West and the North West Development Agency are insufficiently accountable to regional needs and priorities;

-there is a widespread understanding of the shape and nature of the North West Region of England by the people who live in it - and some disquiet that it is less well understood and recognised by those in power in central government;

-this disquiet has grown with the devolution of powers won by Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales which seem to give greater financial support and increased status to those states at the expense of the English regions.

We propose after consultation with the people of the region that:

-all political parties active in the region should address the issue of regional governance in their General Election manifestos with a view to legislation early in the next Parliament;

-a referendum question be framed to establish if there is popular support for a form of regional government in the North West.

-when such a referendum is put to the people of the region, the enabling legislation should be put speedily to the Westminster Parliament in a Bill which delineates the size, powers and administration of a North West Body in a manner which reduces bureaucratic costs and confusion, devolves power down from the centre but does not reduce the powers of local government;

-where appropriate we should work in concert with other English regions seeking similar developments, and with them urge other levels of government at local, regional, state, national and European levels to seek a completed Constitutional Settlement for the United Kingdom.

*Setting the North West Budget (Chapter 5)

We find that:

- the settlements made for many years via the Barnett formula by Treasury with states and regions are to the detriment of the North West. This formula needs to relate more closely to regional needs and priorities;

-many regional bodies with significant responsibilities and funds for public services and economic investment are not accountable to the electorates of the region;

-there is continuing confusion as to which of a whole array of central government appointed bodies with regional offices has responsibility for particular schemes.

We propose that a Regional Body should:

-negotiate and agree a single block grant from the Treasury in a similar way to other devolved bodies in Scotland and Wales;

-seek to have the Barnett formula reviewed every 5 or 6 years;

-co-ordinate, prioritise and administer all regional public sector budgets incorporating the current work of the NWDA, Government Office for the North West - GONW and regional quangos;

-in particular, strategic regional policy in the following would be at the heart of the new Body's work: economic, social and environmental development; transport; post 16 education and training and skill development; health; arts and culture.

*Electing the North West Body (Chapter 6)

We find that:

-there is a narrow majority shown in opinion polls in favour of greater regional autonomy;

-there is considerable disenchantment with the electoral processes with turnout being under 20 per cent in some local and European elections;

-the argument about different voting methods is now more widely understood;

-the uncertain nature of the future House of Lords has an influence upon our discussions on regional autonomy within a national settlement.

We propose:

-an enabling Bill for the establishment of a North West Body with strategic powers. The Bill could allow a second referendum asking the people of the North West their choice of voting system i.e. First Past the Post; Alternative Vote Plus; or Single Transferable Vote;

-a strategic body which would be elected with constituencies or affinities based on identifiable county or sub-regional communities. Those elected would appoint officers of the Body; decide on their standing orders; and decide on one or more locations for their meetings;

-the next stage in the reform of the House of Lords should enable a more regionally based membership - the minority by election but leaving a number of seats to be by appointment from economic, social and faith partners who may not be allied with political parties. Membership should be based on a fixed term.



north west constitutional convention

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North West Charter

- > Promote the devolution of power from the centre and explore the case for increased regional autonomy;
- > Explore fair voting at regional level and links to a reformed national second chamber.
- > Secure a fair budget for the North West and build strong relationships with other regions in Europe.
- > Establish the need for a clear written National Constitutional settlement.

NORTH WEST CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

PUBLIC CONSULTATION PROGRAMME



The Convention's report 'New Way Forward – No Way Back' proposes a referendum to establish whether there is popular support for a form of regional government in the North West before making an approach to government.

The following series of public consultation meetings, structured on a sub regional basis, aims to gauge public support and stimulate a debate about regional government and how this region should be governed in future years.

The Programme is detailed below, with each meeting structured around a theme of local interest.

* STOCKPORT FOOTBALL CLUB

Date : Friday, 6 July 2001
Time : 6.30 pm.
Theme: 'Winning for the North West – can we compete with Wembley'.

Speakers : Tony Lloyd MP
Councillor Neil Derbyshire – Chair of Liberal Democrats in NW
Khan Moghal – Manchester Council for Community Relations
Councillor Kath Robinson – Deputy Leader, Manchester CC

* CHESTER INTERNATIONAL MOATHOUSE HOTEL

Date : Thursday, 12 July 2001
Time : 12.00 Noon.
Theme: 'Bringing business to the North West – can we properly compete?'

Speakers : Councillor Pauleen Lane – Member of Convention Steering Group and Deputy Leader of Trafford Borough Council
Councillor Paul Findlow- Leader of Cheshire County Council
Representative of the Institute of Directors
Representative of Warrington Borough Council.

* LIVERPOOL TOWN HALL

Date : Friday, 20 July 2001
Time : 6.30 pm
Theme: 'Making it in the North West – doing it ourselves'

Speakers : Louise Ellman MP
Councillor Les Byrom, NW Conservatives
Councillor Mike Storey – NW Liberal Democrats

*** OTHER MEETINGS**

Other meetings currently being arranged are :

Blackpool – 7th September 2001 at 6.30 pm
Warrington – 14th September 2001 at 6.30 pm
Carlisle – 21st September 2001 at 6.30 pm

*** THE CONVENTION WEB SITE**

If you are unable to attend any of the meetings please visit our Web Site at www.nwra.gov.uk/concon and let the Convention have your views on regional government.