



Devolution: Impacts on national and local government, localism and the historic environment (update to Assessment 2015-06)

Sarah Reilly sarah.reilly@HistoricEngland.org.uk

01223 582765 – 07825 732325

Overview

- The local authority landscape is changing as central government passes more responsibilities to different groups of authorities as part of its policy of devolution. This is taking place within a wider context of (a) the issue of coming to prominence as part of the Scottish Independence debate; and (b) large cuts to local budgets which have forced authorities to look at their own structures and functions.
- The Cities and Local Government Devolution Act seeks to '*devolve far reaching powers over economic development, transport and social care to large cities which choose to have elected mayors*'. This will follow those examples of devolution that are already in process, principally Greater Manchester (which has seen the devolution of health responsibilities).
- The motivation is to address the lack of balance that exists with economic growth being based around London. This principle is also framing the language used (the 'Northern Powerhouse').
- There has been friction between those arguing for devolution based around cities (e.g. Leeds, Manchester, Sheffield) and those who argue for devolution to English Counties. Whilst the Act references cities specifically, this has not stopped some county councils (Cornwall) developing bids for

areas where the city led model is not appropriate. The case for Cornwall set a precedent by bidding for 'local' stewardship of English Heritage sites and monuments, and control over Historic England listing rights.

- The impact on investment in local Historic Environment services will continue to be the result of local prioritisation.
- It will be important to maintain intelligence on the impact on services of the different devolution options being developed.
- It will also be essential to examine how heritage protection in the planning system is carried out in any new structures.
- Historic England and the sector will need to monitor the (historic environment) content of devolution proposals.



Lancashire County Council @BBC news

Horizon	Horizon 2 (3-10 years)	Based on the next five years under the current government
Importance	High	Devolution and cuts to local government funding have already demonstrated a range of models, some of which include Historic Environment service provision, and others that don't. Where the latter is occurring, there is a severe danger of damage to the historic environment through poorly advised planning decisions
Credibility	High	Based on the rate of change seen since the Scottish referendum in 2014 (which prompted the devolution debate in England), there is no question of the actualité of the issues herein.
<i>Response</i>	Recommendation:	Advocacy and support from both the historic environment sector for the provision of services and support at local level from Historic England.
	Dissemination:	External
<i>Links</i>	Associated Horizon Scan(s)	<p>HEI Horizon scans -</p> <p>2014-07 National Infrastructure Plan, D McOmish</p> <p>2014-03 Neighbourhood Planning, J Lake & O Lloyd-James</p> <p>2013-05 Whole Place Community budgets and the historic environment, O Lloyd-James</p> <p>2013-29 Historic Environment Record Backlogs, S Reilly</p> <p>2013-13 Development pressures on local authorities, O Lloyd-James</p> <p>2013-01 Local authority budgetary cuts – changing the shape of local government</p> <p>HEI Assessments –</p> <p>2013-01 Local authority budgetary cuts – changing the shape of local government</p> <p>2013-10 HERs and HE services in local authorities, S Reilly (in revision)</p>
		<p>Other Links: ALGAO and IHBC annual staffing figures (2006 – 2015)</p> <p>https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/seventh-report-la-staff-resources/</p>
<i>Consultees</i>	Victoria Thomson, Andrew Vines, Owain Lloyd-James	
<i>Author(s)</i>	Sarah Reilly	
<i>Date of completion</i>	March 8 th 2016	
<i>Agreed for dissemination</i>	 Jen Heathcote, Head of Historic Environment Intelligence Team	
<i>Date</i>	12-05-2016	

1. INTRODUCTION

The local authority landscape is changing rapidly as central government passes more responsibilities to groups of authorities as part of its wider policy of devolution. Set within a context of cuts to local government budgets, local authorities have been forced to examine their structures and service provision on a reduced resource.

This report provides an update to *Devolution: Impacts on national and local government, localism and the historic environment* (HEI Assessment 2015-06) which introduced the subject of devolution and local government just after the Scottish referendum on devolution and around the time of the last general election (2015). That assessment stands alone and is very much ‘of its time’ in terms of what we understood and were able to forecast then, yet the issues raised and the responses suggested remain largely relevant and will be re-articulated in this document. This report will identify any new issues and possible responses for the sector.

2. CONTEXT

The Scottish referendum on September 18th 2014 prompted the start of a national debate on the potential benefits of decentralised powers. This was accelerated by local government budget cuts and a need to seriously review functions and methods of income generation. On top of this, the debate centred primarily on how local government could better provide services for their communities and at a local not central level, meeting specific local requirements depending on geography and linking into the regions’ wellbeing agenda¹. The debates and models are discussed in the original assessment but it was comprehensively agreed that no ‘one size’ solution would ‘fit all’.

The key options were set out on the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill (28 May 2015) which introduced new opportunities to ‘*devolve far reaching powers over economic development, transport and social care to large cities which chose to have elected mayors*’.² This followed in the footsteps of already agreed or in progress City Deals, Growth Deals and the first devolution agreements with Greater Manchester, Leeds City Region and Sheffield City Region. These quickly set out models for combined authorities and were swiftly followed by proposals from most English geographical regions (see Appendix 1 and map at <http://www.local.gov.uk/devolution/map>).

More recently, in the debate about Cornish devolution, the original proposal included the transfer of Historic England resources and staff to Cornwall. While not taken forward by DCMS and Cabinet office, one of the outcomes was a commitment to a local HEF, plus a study of ‘Cornish distinctiveness’ as a first stage to them better managing what they see as important locally for the historic environment.

¹http://issuu.com/lgapublications/docs/devonext_and_health/1?e=16807299/14645829

² <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2015-16/citiesandlocalgovernmentdevolution.html>

3. ISSUES

The following section addresses the issues perceived at time of writing the original assessment and adds any new relevant context.

3.1 Impact on local government services

The 'devolution' debate is set within the context of local government reform driven, since 2010 by budgetary cuts. Local government models are therefore already changing rapidly and moving towards shared services of some description (a shared CEO, back office services, specialist services contracted between councils via Service Level Agreements etc.) in order to meet efficiency savings targets.

The largest average real-term spending reductions by single-tier and county councils were to planning and development services (37.6%), and cultural and related services (24.4%).

The Local Government Association (LGA) funding model for 2010/11 to 2019/20 reveals that the financial black hole facing local government is widening by £2.1 billion a year and will reach £14.4 billion by 2020. They predict that the money available to deliver all other local services, including leisure and cultural facilities, school support services, fixing the roads, building new homes and promoting economic growth will shrink by 46% by 2020, down from £26.6 billion in 2010/11 to £14.3 billion by the end of the decade³. This makes the case for local government to be able to generate income even stronger.

In these circumstances, it is not hard to predict where the historic environment may rank in priority against other demands on local services, in particular health and social care. Shared service models are increasing and may be the only way to protect non-statutory services. In this context, the need to embed the historic environment in planning (which *is* statutory) is essential, while at the same time, so is emphasising the case for the financial, cultural and wellbeing value of heritage.

3.2 Impact on historic environment service provision

Since drafting the original assessment, we are already seeing the negative effects of budgetary impacts on decision making about historic environment services. Lancashire for example, as part of a set of measures designed to save £262 million by 2020, is closing 40 of its 74 libraries, all 5 museums, terminated its archaeological contracts and is outsourcing the HER. This also affects planning in Cumbria, whose HER was maintained 2 days a week by the Lancashire HERO. They are currently modelling options for a combined service.

On top of this, the government, through the Housing and Planning Bill, is seeking to bring forward a pilot scheme where competition is introduced into the processing of planning applications. The intention is, in pilot areas, to allow alternative organisation (at the choice of the applicant) to process applications. Decisions will remain the responsibility of the local authority. As of February 2016 how competition in the processing of planning applications may affect historic environment services in is yet to be examined.

³ http://www.local.gov.uk/finance/-/journal_content/56/10180/4057616/ARTICLE#sthash.sajrDkue.dpuf

Historic England commissions the gathering of figures from both ALGAO and IHBC on historic environment staffing levels (down by 28% since 2006⁴), as well as archaeological planning casework figures⁵ and HER health checks.⁶ Historic England holds data on Local Authority Profiles⁷ and we can use this data to monitor the adequacy of historic environment services through close collaboration with Historic England's local offices.

As a sector, we need to continue expanding the evidence base of changing local government models taking care to include new variables influenced by transferred powers, such as possible tensions between increased development and infrastructure pressures as devolved authorities encourage investment, versus the ability of the service to manage the historic environment elements of that.

The academic argument about a sustainable service needs to be taken further and the discussion had on whether new models of authorities, with or without transferred powers, can provide a better service. That is, step aside from the argument that fewer (staff) necessarily equals poorer service and examine more creative means of providing them.

3.3 Impact on the historic environment

The impact on the physical historic environment is harder to assess because of the different models of devolution being proposed and their impact on the services engaged in historic environment management.

One could surmise that the most direct impact on the tangible historic environment is from physical damage. There may be tension between pressure on a devolved authority trying to generate income through housing and business development and the ability of historic environment advisors (both Conservation Officers and Archaeologists) from an already stretched curatorial sector⁸ to manage that change.

⁴ <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/publications/sixth-report-la-staff-resources/>

⁵ ALGAO Planning and Casework Survey (Project number 6675). In draft March 2015

⁶ HER Content and Computing Survey 2014. English Heritage September 2014

⁷ <http://hc.english-heritage.org.uk/local-authority-profiles/>

⁸ 2014-07 The National Infrastructure Plan 2014: Impacts on the Historic Environment. English Heritage July 2014

3.4 Impact on Localism

The supposition that devolution engenders pure localism needs unpicking. Since the publication of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF⁹) in March 2012 and the introduction of the Localism Act 2011, the country has seen an uptake of the powers available to local people by way of neighbourhood plans¹⁰ (as of April 2014, nearly 1100 plans were in development or passed by referendum).

In the words of Richard Leese MP, “If we live in a country where people perceive that all the big decisions are made a long, long way away in London, they are not going to be that interested in their local council.” Research has been carried out regularly since ‘*Power of Place*’ was published in 2000¹¹ into what make ‘place’ significant for people but is this influenced by who manages the economy at a local level? Does being nearer the source of decision-making actually empower people? Is there a causal link between devolution and neighbourhood planning? And if there is, how can we ensure that the historic environment figures more highly in them?

An argument for ‘pure’ localism suggests that local residents will be expected to assume roles that local government previously held and where ‘citizens and the state need to work together to secure a good society’.¹² This is a direction of travel that is fraught with contradictory opinion and a debate needs to be had about the potential impact of using volunteers in place of local government staff. We are already seeing this happening, for example in local libraries and HERs yet there must be a very clear distinction between what is ‘core’ and what is ‘added value’.

4. POTENTIAL RESPONSES FOR SECTOR

It is very clear that devolution is a live issue that will impact on historic environment service provision in local government. It is important that the sector (local government staff, ALGAO, IHBC) works with each other and with Historic England to gather evidence (risks and opportunities) on those authorities going through a transfer of powers under the Act and take forward any lessons learned into future bids for devolved powers.

Additionally, the greatest role for the sector is in advocacy; promoting the case that properly advised planning decisions are in the interest of all, do not cause delays nor hinder development. Authorities, of whatever model, with devolved powers need to see that there is not a conflict of interest between home building and the historic environment; that the two should be complementary for the needs and wellbeing of citizens and for the authority’s economic gain.

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/giving-communities-more-power-in-planning-local-development/supporting-pages/neighbourhood-planning>

¹¹ <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/publications/power-of-place/>

¹² Jonathan Carr West in Connected Localism, LGiU June 2013

Given the resource constraints in local government there is an on-going risk that some authorities may seek our resources as part of future devolution deals, even if it is not part of the government agenda. A 'Cornish distinctiveness study' promised by DCMS seems to be devolution expressed as a shift from what we regard as nationally important to what is locally important (whether under legislative control or not) and may appear as a product of future devolution deals.

The sector needs to think creatively about how to provide historic environment services with decreasing or even disappearing budgets, with or without devolution bids, and local authorities need to cooperate with each other when examining options for delivery, while upholding the principles of NPPF and maintaining a coherent approach to heritage protection.

APPENDIX 1: DEVOLUTION DEAL PROPOSALS TO GOVERNMENT AS OF SEPTEMBER 2015

North East

[North East Combined Authority](#)
[Tees Valley](#)

North West

[Greater Manchester](#)
[Liverpool City Region](#)
[Cheshire and Warrington](#)

Yorkshire and Humber

[Sheffield City Region](#)
[Hull](#)
[Leeds City Region](#)

South East

[Hampshire and Isle of Wight](#)
[Oxfordshire and districts](#)
[England's Economic Heartland \(Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire\)](#)
[Three Southern Counties \(West Sussex, East Sussex\) and Surrey](#)
[Greater Brighton](#)

South West

[Heart of South West](#)
[West of England](#)
[Gloucestershire](#)
[Cornwall](#)
[Wiltshire](#)
[Dorset](#)

East of England

[Cambridgeshire and Peterborough](#)
[Essex](#)
[Southend and Thurrock](#)
[Suffolk](#)
[Norfolk](#)

East Midlands

[D2N2 \(Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire\)](#) Please also see '[North Midlands](#)' draft devolution deal - addition as of January 2016.
[Leicestershire](#)
[Lincolnshire](#)

West Midlands

[West Midlands Combined Authority](#)
[Telford and Wrekin](#)

London Councils
[London Councils](#)

See more at: http://www.local.gov.uk/devolution/september-submissions/-/journal_content/56/10180/7505899/ARTICLE#sthash.yfwZIQg2.dpuf