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Urban Elites in England: New Models of Executive Governance

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Introduction

Political leadership in urban England is in the process of transformation. Or at least it ought to be, for two reasons. First, as we discuss below, the operational context of urban political leadership has been radically modified over the past 20 years (and particularly since the Labour government came to power in 1997). Secondly, the institutional context of urban political leadership is currently in the process of transformation. To quote Sweeting (2002: 3): 'Local political leadership has moved on from an era when it involved heading a local political party, with the aim of controlling a local council which produced local services. Leadership in local government is now a more expansive activity, requiring leaders to interact with other local stakeholders … to address matters of concern, whether or not they are directly within the realm of local government's service responsibilities'. As we write (mid-2003), elections for elected mayors have taken place in eleven English local authorities following legislation which has created, for the first time, formal executives in most of urban England.[1]

But will this transformation actually take place? Will form follow function? Logic suggests that it should. However, the pressures for change in leadership task priorities and style have already come up against the reality of the long-term cultural traditions of local politics in urban England, and in particular the continued dominance of the party group, which in many ways is inimical to the exercise of individual political leadership. In this article we explore the likely interplay between the changing operational and institutional context and the resilient traditions of party group behaviour. We conclude that, although in due course a transformation in urban political leadership is likely, the rate of progress to that end is likely to be differential, and in many cases tardy.

The changing operational context

As the introductory article by Borraz and John (this issue) points out, there has been a move to governance in all European countries. Nowhere has this change of role been more apparent than in England. The 1976–2003 period has seen a significant reduction in the service provision role of local authorities, with several service responsibilities (e.g. tertiary education) moving out of the purview of local authorities, whilst in other service areas there has been a significant reduction in local choice. Taking into account also the climate of financial austerity and spending restrictions within which authorities have operated, it is clear that the dominant model of the 1960s and 1970s — the self-sufficient local authority — has been superseded by an 'enabling' or 'community leadership' model. This new (or enhanced) external role means that urban political leaders have had to become adept at coalition-building, as well as the more familiar

1 Shire districts (invariably in rural areas) with a population of 85,000 or less can, however, opt for a streamlined but non-executive structure. Note that under separate legislation a mayoral contest had taken place in London in May 2000 and had been won by Ken Livingstone (Independent).

roles as party group managers. From a role-set which was dominated by inward-looking priorities (how do I carry the party group with me over this?), leaders' agendas are now much more focused on outward-looking priorities (how do I persuade local stakeholders to cooperate on this?). There is still a balance to be struck between the various leadership tasks (see below) but the change of emphasis is clear, and has been responded to with more or less enthusiasm and to a greater or lesser extent in urban authorities throughout England.

The changing institutional context

It is the UK which has provided one of the most dramatic recent examples of institutional change. After a century and a half in which 'the local political system remained entrenched in a legal framework where parties and the leadership were invisible and informal', the 1997–2001 Labour government introduced a radical change in local political management structures which gave a new emphasis to the leadership role. The Local Government Act 2000 requires all English local authorities to replace or modify the committee system of decision-making. As Figure 1 shows, the Act contains four principal options, the thrust of which is to strengthen executive leadership.

This legislation represents a strong encouragement on the part of central government for local authorities to switch leadership approaches from the traditional northern European model — weaker, more collective modes of leadership in which political parties play a major role — to the southern European model, where 'strong' individual leaders play a particularly important role in the articulation of interests and in brokerage between the centre and locality (see Borraz and John, this issue). The 2000 Local Government Act facilitates this move, particularly in respect of the two mayoral options. The move from local government to local governance, which has since 1997 been given a more 'positive' interpretation for local authorities by the Labour government in its use of the term 'community leadership', is further reason for a switch in leadership role to a more individualized, less party political interpretation. In the remainder of this article we explore the extent to which this 'logical' change is likely to happen in urban England.

Responding to the choices in the 2000 Local Government Act

The tension between the logic of the new legislation (and of the move towards community governance/leadership) and traditional features of local political culture is well-illustrated by the pattern of responses of English local authorities to the

1. **Directly elected mayor with a cabinet**
   The mayor is directly elected by the whole electorate and will appoint the cabinet from among the councillors
2. **Cabinet with a leader**
   The leader is directly elected by local people, and the cabinet will be made up of councillors whether appointed by the leader or elected by the council.
3. **Directly elected mayor with a council manager**
   The mayor is directly elected by local people, with a full-time manager appointed by the council to whom both strategic policy and day-to-day decision-making will be delegated.
4. **Modified committee system**
   This is available to councils under 85,000 in population and also to councils (e.g. Brighton and Hove) that hold a referendum on introducing either of the mayoral options but which the electorate rejects.

Figure 1 Leadership models in the Local Government Act 2000

opportunities presented by the 2000 Act. Although local authorities could not introduce either of the elected mayor alternatives without first holding a referendum, the choice to hold a referendum was an unconstrained one, i.e. any authority which favoured the option (or wished to give the public a chance to express its view) could have held a referendum. In the event, by December 2002 only 30 authorities had chosen to do so with not a single referendum in any of the large cities (see Table 1). All authorities had to consult the public over the three options and were expected to hold a referendum if there was a significant degree of support for an elected mayor (DETR, 2000). The

Table 1 Results of mayoral referendums to August 2003

Authority	Date	Result	Yes %	Turnout %	Voting Method
Bedford[a]	21.2.02	Yes	67	15.5	In person
Berwick upon Tweed[a]	7.6.01	No	26	63.8	In person
Brighton and Hove	18.10.01	No	38	32.2	Postal
Cheltenham	28.6.01	No	33	31.0	Postal
Corby	1.10.02	No	46	30.9	Postal
Doncaster	20.9.01	Yes	65	25.4	Postal
Durham	20.11.01	No	41	29.0	Postal
Ealing LB	12.12.02	No	45	9.8	Postal & In person
Gloucester	28.6.01	No	31	30.8	Postal
Hackney LB	2.5.02	Yes	59	26.8	Postal
Harlow	24.1.02	No	25	36.4	Postal
Harrow	7.12.01	No	42	26.1	Postal
Hartlepool	18.10.01	Yes	51	31.9	Postal
Kirklees	4.10.01	No	27	13.0	In person
Lewisham LB	18.10.01	Yes	51	18.3	Postal
Mansfield[a]	2.5.02	Yes	54	21.0	In person
Middlesbrough	18.10.01	Yes	84	33.9	Postal
Newcastle-under-Lyme[a]	2.5.02	No	44	31.5	In person
Newham LB	31.1.02	Yes	68	25.9	Postal
North Tyneside	18.10.01	Yes	58	36.2	Postal
Oxford[a]	2.5.02	No	44	32.6	In person
Plymouth	24.1.02	No	41	39.8	Postal
Redditch	8.11.01	No	44	28.3	Postal
Sedgefield	18.10.01	No	47	33.3	Postal
Shepway	31.1.02	No	44	36.3	Postal
Southwark LB[b]	31.1.02	No	31	11.2	In person
Stoke-on-Trent[a]	2.5.02	Yes	58	26.8	In person
Sunderland	11.10.01	No	43	10.0	In person
Watford	12.7.01	Yes	52	24.5	Postal
West Devon	31.1.02	No	23	41.8	Postal

[a] Following successful 5% petition by local electors
[b] Following direction from the Secretary of State

Source: Adapted from Rallings *et al*. (2002) and New Local Government Network website (August 2003)

widespread antipathy to the idea of an elected mayor throughout English local government was illustrated by the fact that in many authorities where a significant degree of support for elected mayors did emerge from the consultation process, a choice was made not to hold a referendum. In Southwark the government insisted that a referendum be held and in three other cases (Bradford, Birmingham and Thurrock) it initially indicated that it would consider similar action. However, following a decisive 'No' vote in Southwark, Local Government Minister Nick Raynsford announced that the deputy Prime Minister (John Prescott) 'does not intend to use his powers in these cases' (see *Municipal Journal*, 27 June 2002).

The government's preferred option throughout the legislative process was for elected mayors, particularly in the cities, on the grounds that mayors would incorporate more directly the desired objective of 'transparency' and 'accountability' in decision-making. They also hoped that a directly-elected high-profile local leader would help regenerate local interest in local civic affairs and thus contribute to local democratic renewal.

But that is not the way things are seen in the vast majority of urban authorities. To many councillors (and leaders) the idea of a directly-elected mayor is a threat to the familiar culture of local political parties and party groups on councils. The 'leader and cabinet' model, however, though still requiring major changes, is widely seen as less threatening. The council leader can still be elected and dismissed by the council itself (i.e. by the majority group on the council, if there is one). He or she is more 'amenable to control' through party groups and local party mechanisms than an elected mayor could be. Hence, there has been an overwhelming preference for the cabinet and leader model, and a parallel antipathy to referenda (with their accompanying risk of a yes vote). The government's preference for the southern European model of individual leadership has been countered by the north European (collective) preference of the vast majority of local authorities.

In May 2002, the first English mayors were elected under the terms of the 2000 Act. Before this, Ken Livingstone in Greater London had been elected in May 2000 under separate legislation, the Greater London Authority Act, 1999. In London, Ken Livingstone fought the campaign as an independent since, although he had been a long-standing Labour Party member and was a current Labour MP, he was unable to persuade the Labour Party leadership that he had appropriate credentials to lead Britain's largest city. Frank Dobson, a Labour cabinet minister, was ultimately chosen as the official Labour candidate, thereby forcing Livingstone to stand as an independent. As Rallings *et al*. observe (2002: 79), 'personality politics dominated the mayoral contest with Livingstone able to make the broadest appeal, particularly to protest voters of all political persuasions'. On a turnout of 33.65% Livingstone 'secured a convincing victory … with a total first-preference vote that nearly equalled the Conservative and Labour votes put together' (Pimlott and Rao, 2002: 94). The left-wing politician who had once led the old Greater London Council (GLC) became the first mayor of the new Greater London Authority (GLA), the first directly elected mayor in England.

By the end of 2002 the mayoral option that had been overwhelmingly balloted in the rest of England outside London had been the 'mayor and cabinet' option. The mayor and council manager option (a weak mayoral model) generated little political support largely because it places so much power in the hands of an appointed officer (the council manager) as opposed to an elected politician. In the May 2002 elections in the London Boroughs of Newham (see Leitch, 2002) and Lewisham, and in Doncaster, Labour mayors were elected (in each case the council elections also resulted in Labour-dominated councils). In the North-East of England 'independent' mayors were elected in Hartlepool and Middlesbrough. In Hartlepool the new mayor is an independent, Stuart Drummond, whose role as 'H'Angus the Monkey', mascot of the local football team, 'was symptomatic of the public's disdain for party politicians and a willingness to show that displeasure by voting for what many from outside the borough regarded as a joke candidate' (Rallings *et al*., 2002: 80). In Middlesbrough the successful candidate was a high-profile ex-police inspector from the Cleveland police authority. He has had

to work with a Labour-dominated council and his Hartlepool counterpart with a council which has no overall control. The other two authorities involved in May 2002 campaigns were North Tyneside (Conservative mayor elected in a Labour-dominated council) and Watford (Liberal Democrat mayor elected in a 'no overall control' council).

In October 2002 there were a further four mayoral elections in Bedford, Mansfield, Hackney and Stoke-on-Trent. Independent candidates won in three of these, with only Hackney returning a mainstream party (Labour) mayor. In Bedford the successful candidate, Francis Branston, a local newspaper owner, fought for the Better Bedford Independents (BBI) and strongly attacked the performance of the local council. In Mansfield Tony Egginton defeated mainstream party candidates on his platform of 'common sense management without the dogma of party politics'. In Stoke-on-Trent the winner was Mike Wolfe, a former manager of the city's Citizen's Advice Bureau, a candidate whose 'support for gay rights appears not to have harmed his prospects amongst the city's voters' (Rallings *et al*., 2002: 87). The result in Hackney saw October's only success for one of the mainstream parties where Labour's Jules Pipe, the current council leader, was elected well ahead of his Conservative rival.

Taking the eleven mayoral contests together, only three — Middlesbrough, North Tyneside and Watford — saw more than a third of the electorate vote. This low level of turnout 'is more surprising given the number of candidates that each contest attracted. Eleven contests saw a total of 73 candidates stand for election, an average of more than six per election and much higher than is normal at other local elections' (Rallings *et al*., 2002: 89). This reflects the low level of interest in the 30 mayoral referendums where the average turnout was only 29%. While the mayoral elections have broken the dominance of mainstream parties (see Table 2) they have certainly not led to the renaissance of local democracy. The implications of this development for the practice of local political leadership are explored later in this article.

Table 2 Mayoral election results

Council	Mayor Elected	Council Majority	Electorate
Bedford BC*	Independent	Con 24, Lab 14, L/D 12, Ind 4	108,729
Doncaster MBC	Labour	Lab 42, Con 7, L/D 9, Ind 2, Others 3	215,949
Hackney LBC*	Labour	Lab 45, Con 9, L/D 3, Ind 4	131,507
Hartlepool Unitary Authority	Independent	Lab, 22, Con 8, L/D 12, Ind 4	61,832
Lewisham LBC	Labour	Lab 45, Con 2, L/D 4	178,902
Mansfield DC*	Independent	Lab 39, Con 5, L/D 2,	77,729
Middlesbrough Unitary Authority	Independent	Lab 41, L/D 7, Con 4, Ind 1	101,737
Newham LBC	Labour	Lab 59, Others 1	154,247
North Tyneside MBC	Conservative	Lab 34, Con 19, L/D 7	145,188
Stoke-on-Trent Unitary Authority*	Independent	Lab 21, Con 6, L/D 11, Ind 22	183,504
Watford DC	Liberal Democrat	Lab 15, Con 7, L/D 13, Ind 1	60,310

* These elections were held in October 2002; all others were held in May 2002. Subsequently (June 2003), a by-election was held in North Tyneside which Linda Arkley retained for the Conservatives on a 31% turnout.

Source: Adapted from Rallings *et al*. (2002) and New Local Government Network website (August 2003)

Concepts of political leadership

Although, as Stone (1995: 96) argues, 'there is no well-developed theory of political leadership', the topic has generated an increasing amount of theoretical interest in England in recent years. There have been important contributions by Jones and Norton (1978), Game (1979) and Parkinson (1985) and more recently by John and Cole (1999; Cole and John, 2001), Leach and Wilson (2000; 2002), Elcock (2001) and Sweeting (2002). All have drawn heavily on the prolific US literature on the topic, in particular Kotter and Lawrence (1974), Burns (1978), Stone (1995) and Svara (1990).

John and Cole's comparative study of leadership and networks in France and England demonstrated the tensions experienced by English leaders aspiring to play a 'mayoral style' leadership role before the introduction of executive options in the 2000 Act. They argue that such leaders learnt that 'old patterns of management and political control simply did not work' but aspirations to overcome this barrier floundered on their lack of power and the ease with which they could be deposed by their supporters (John and Cole, 1999: 113). This finding raises the interesting question of whether the explicit mayoral powers embodied in the legislation will enable this barrier to be overcome. Equally important for the vast majority of authorities who have opted for the 'cabinet and leader' model will be whether the enhanced emphasis on individualized leadership will have a similar (if less pronounced) effect.

Sweeting (2002) and Pimlott and Rao (2002) have produced important examinations of the early experience of Ken Livingstone as Mayor of London, important because they provide the first research-based studies of the operation of the mayoral system in urban England. Yet in many ways the Greater London example is atypical. The Greater London Authority is largely a strategic body, with little in the way of direct responsibility for the provision of services. Like mayors in other towns and cities, Livingstone is expected to 'preserve and enhance London's competitiveness, tackle London's problems and speak up for Londoners and their interests' (DETR, 1998: vii). Where he differs is that he does not have to balance (or much less so) the responsibility for managing high-profile services such as education, social services and housing with such externally-oriented networking. As is the case with his counterparts in, for example, Hartlepool, North Tyneside and Middlesbrough, Livingstone is faced with an assembly that did not elect him and is to some extent at least politically hostile to him (the Assembly has 'no overall control' and Livingstone cannot necessarily rely on the support of the nine Labour members, given the circumstances of his election). He does, however, have the support of the public (and indeed of the majority of London's Labour rank-and-file). The ability to use this popular mandate, and the legitimacy it bestows in the face of political opposition, will be one of the key challenges faced by elected mayors.

Sweeting makes an important distinction that, although within the GLA the balance of power indicates that Livingstone falls into the 'strong mayor' category, outside the GLA, in formal terms, he is a 'weak mayor', obliged by the legislative framework and the complexity of the tasks with which he is presented to engage and secure the participation of other stakeholders. This differentiated role reflects the position faced by elected mayors in other urban authorities. Although there are significant differences from the GLA situation, their power base within the authority is relatively strong; outside the authority they have few powers (or sanctions) and unlike many southern European countries there is little tradition in England of mayoral-inspired community leadership.

Leach and Wilson (2000) in their study of political leadership in England emphasize the importance of a conceptual framework based on leadership task. This emphasis on the centrality of purpose in the analysis of leadership behaviour is highlighted by Clarence Stone:

> Leadership revolves around purpose, and purpose is at the heart of the leader-follower relationship. Indeed, in some cases a compelling statement of mission not only gives direction to a group, but is its formative experience, shaping the identity of group members by highlighting a shared aim (1995: 96–7).

What is the nature of these tasks? Task-orientated leadership analysis is a well-developed field of study in organizational behaviour. Selznick's conceptualization of four functions of institutional leadership provides a useful starting point. His functions are: the definition of institutional mission and role; the institutional embodiment of purpose; the defence of institutional integrity; and the ordering of internal conflict (Selznick, 1957). However, these headings are essentially a general perspective for the study of leadership in any administrative organization and require modification in the context of a 'political' organization such as a local authority.

One of the most influential studies of political leadership in America — the Kotter and Lawrence (1974) study of elected mayors — identifies six behavioural models of political leadership, of which the authors argue two are concerned primarily with the setting of policy, two with its execution, and two with organization and service management. They thus identify three key mayoral processes: agenda-setting, task accomplishment and network-building and maintenance. If the last process — network-building and maintenance — is subdivided into internal (maintaining cohesion) and external (representing the authority in the outside world) elements, then a fourfold categorization of leadership tasks can be developed that is particularly helpful in the British context. These tasks, initially summarized below before being developed in greater detail, provide a useful framework for analysing the development of urban political leadership.

- *Maintaining the cohesion of the administration*: The task of maintaining cohesion in a politically-led authority has a number of different implications. There is the need to ensure the cohesion of the party group, particularly for a group which holds a majority on a council. There is also the need to ensure a cohesive approach amongst the leading members and officers. The task of maintaining cohesion within the local party network is also important, particularly in the Labour Party. In Labour groups where there is a tradition of factionalism (e.g. Leicester) or of strained relations between party group and local party (e.g. Walsall) this is a particularly challenging task. The leader's continued existence as leader may well depend on his or her ability to carry it out effectively.
- *Developing strategic policy direction*: This task requires the setting of a strategic framework within which the authority can work (What are our key priorities and values? What principles should govern budgetary allocations?). The new requirement for local authorities to play a leading role in the development of community strategies (through the medium of local strategic partnerships) provides an explicit incentive for this kind of activity.
- *Representing the authority in the external world*: This task has increased in importance as local governance has become more fragmented. It involves the need for leaders to establish or maintain contacts with a wide range of individuals and organizations (including the local media) to ensure that the authority's strategic agenda is furthered. Local strategic partnerships (see above) are a key mechanism here, but increasingly leaders are operating within a set of overlapping networks, including those operating at regional level.
- *Ensuring task accomplishment*: This acknowledges that the conventional 'textbook' division of labour — members make policy and officers implement it — does not correspond to reality in most authorities. There is a widespread view amongst political leaders that they have a responsibility to ensure that what the majority party (or coalition) wants to happen actually does happen. There is an important political dimension here; effective task accomplishment can contribute to the prospects of future electoral success (more so than impressive strategic documents).

The relative priority given to these respective leadership tasks is crucial to an interpretation of the changing role of urban leadership in England under the new legislation. In the past, the main priority has been the sustaining of a dominant coalition (mainly but not wholly concerned with a majority party or, in its absence, a

coalition of parties). If Borraz and John are right, and there are new opportunities for local leaders to break free from the constraints of party hierarchies and develop 'popular policies and initiatives whilst at the same time seeking to please business leaders' (Borraz and John, this issue: 114), then the largely internal 'maintenance of cohesion' role should reduce in significance, allowing leaders more time to concentrate on 'strategic direction' and 'external networking'. This scenario, as we argue below, is more plausible for elected mayors than it is for leaders in 'cabinet and leader' models who remain heavily reliant on party group support. Given that the new arrangements have only recently been implemented, it is not yet possible to explore in any detail what is actually happening. What follows is an assessment in which a range of hypotheses are set out and justified.

Exploration of impact of introducing new forms of leadership

There are a number of important differences in the power bases of urban political leaders under the mayoral.[2] and non-mayoral executive systems which have recently been introduced in England. In many respects mayors are in a much stronger position. First, they can select (and dismiss) a cabinet of their own choosing from whatever party or parties are represented on the council (or indeed from outside the council if they so choose). In this sense at least, the power of the eleven mayors elected in 2002 mirrors that of the Prime Minister! Although the 2000 Act does offer the opportunity for the leaders (in the cabinet and leader model) to select their own cabinet, in the vast majority of cases the power to select cabinet members has been allocated instead to the council. Secondly, the elected mayor is secure in his or her role for a period of four years (barring imprisonment or resignation) whereas the leader in the cabinet and leader model is there for as long (or as briefly) as the council chooses. At any time — but particularly at the Annual Meeting of the council in May of each year — the council (or more realistically the majority party, assuming there is one) may decide to replace a sitting leader with an alternative choice. Thirdly, an elected mayor, even when party politically aligned, is not subject to the control of the party group in the way that the leader in the cabinet and leader model is. In the latter case, a leader may be outvoted in a group meeting in which event there is little choice but to abide by the majority view. The mayor, although he or she may decide to meet the party group on a regular basis (a scenario particularly likely if the mayor is the former leader of a party group on the council), can ignore the group's views if not convinced by them. The mayor, after all, has an individual legitimacy and accountability drawn from election on the basis of a personal manifesto, which, even if it is influenced by local party priorities and contains common elements with the party manifesto adopted at the most recent election, is likely to contain many individual commitments. Fourthly, the way mayors allocate responsibilities within that cabinet is up to them. In theory an elected mayor could, if he or she so wished, personally assume the bulk of the executive responsibilities in relation to individual services (education, social services, etc.) and external responsibilities (e.g. partnerships) and allocate cabinet colleagues relatively weak roles with very limited responsibilities. The leader, in the cabinet and leader model, is rarely accorded such powers. In almost all cases it is the council which decides how cabinet responsibilities are allocated, as well as to whom.

But there are important similarities in the processes which both forms of executive are required to follow which influence the scope for effective leadership in similar ways. First, neither executive — mayoral or non-mayoral — has the power to decide the key policy documents of council — community plan, performance plan, strategic land-use plan and several others including, most importantly, the budget. They have the

2 Henceforth the 'mayoral' model refers to the 'mayor and cabinet' option. Only Stoke-on-Trent has adopted the 'mayor and council manager' option.

responsibility to present and recommend these plans to council but council has the power to accept, reject or modify them. Secondly, any executive decisions which do not fall within the policy framework — i.e. are not in accordance with the policy and budgetary framework agreed by the council — cannot be made without the approval of council. Thirdly, there is a class of executive decision known as 'key decisions' which authorities are required to define on the basis of the level of expenditure involved and/or the extent of their impact. Although these decisions can only be taken by the executive (unless they also fall into the non-compliance category noted above), there is an elaborate consultation process to which they are subject, including detailed consideration by the relevant (non-executive) scrutiny committee. Certainly, 'key decisions' cannot be made speedily by the executive but have to be identified in advance, consulted about and justified in detail before they can be actioned. Finally, under the terms of the 2000 Act, all local authorities have to introduce a system for 'calling-in' executive decisions. They can specify certain conditions for call-in — numbers of councillors, types of justification, etc. — but they cannot ignore the requirement. Thus, there are four major 'checks and balances' which councils can operate to restrict the scope for decisive executive leadership: the power to decide policy and the budget; the power to decide non-conforming executive decisions outside the scope of the policy framework; the right to consultations associated with key decisions; and the power of call-in. It is a formidable array of constraints for which there are few precedents in other European executive systems. In particular, there is a potential 'area of tension' between the democratic legitimacy of the elected mayor linked to the scope to 'get things done' which that legitimacy might be expected to confer and the powers of blockage and delay which the council (or assembly) can, perfectly properly, exercise. As we argue below, that tension will be a particular hazard for elected mayors who do not enjoy a supportive majority within the council.

Ironically, although the formal powers of elected mayors are significantly greater than leaders of councils, the latter may find it much easier to persuade their councils not to use their powers of blockage and delay. The party group system is likely to retain much of its traditional influence in the 'leader and cabinet' model, particularly in situations of majority control or a strong and stable coalition, and would be expected to facilitate the flow of decisions through the system, just as it did prior to the introduction of the new executives.

The influence of the party group under an elected mayor is potentially much less (unless the mayor chooses to respond on a regular basis to the preferences of the dominant party group) but a determined majority party group on council could prove a formidable opponent and obstacle for an elected mayor about whom the dominant group is critical or antagonistic. This kind of scenario will certainly be faced by Ray Mallon in Middlesbrough and by the Conservative-aligned mayor of an otherwise Labour-dominated North Tyneside MBC. The new independent mayor of Hartlepool sensibly selected a cabinet containing representatives of all three of the major parties on the council.

Mayoral/non-mayoral differences

Administrative cohesion

As noted above, the elected mayor does not need to solicit the support of a dominant group or coalition on the council in the same way that a leader in the 'cabinet and leader' model may have to. The latter owes his or her position to the dominant group or coalition, and ignores their views only with considerable risk. Although legally the cabinet (i.e. the leader and his/her associates, the election of whom the leader may have been influential in securing) has the authority to make the vast majority of executive decisions which the council faces, the vulnerability of the leader to immediate

replacement (or 'non-re-election' at the next annual meeting of the council) means that party group views on contentious executive decisions have to be solicited and cannot lightly be ignored. Within this system there will, of course, be dominant charismatic urban leaders who would expect to be able to secure the necessary level of support for options which they favour. But they cannot assume such support. In relation to this task, the move to a formal system of executive government has changed very little; the leader remains in effect dependent on the group that elected him or her. Maintaining administrative cohesion will remain a high priority task.

The relative freedom for manoeuvre between elected mayor and non-mayoral leaders might be expected to become less marked in the year prior to a mayoral election, at least for those mayors with political affiliations. In Doncaster, Newham, Lewisham and Hackney, for example, where a Labour mayor currently operates in conjunction with a Labour-dominated council, there is enhanced pressure to take account of party group views, if only to ensure that the mayor secures re-nomination. Technically it is the local Labour party that will decide who gets the nomination. However, if an elected mayor has lost the support of his or her party colleagues on the council, their influence could well prove decisive in the overlapping party group/local party mechanisms in deselecting the mayor. In those circumstances, the mayor would have to decide whether or not to put himself/herself forward at the next mayoral election as an independent candidate (as Ken Livingstone did in the first Greater London Authority mayoral election). The extent to which this option would be viewed as feasible would depend on two factors: first, evidence of the popularity of the existing mayor as an individual; and, secondly, his or her perception of potential damage to a political career (e.g. prospect of securing a party nomination at a general election) of taking such a step.

Strategic policy direction

A recent paper from the Cabinet Office on leadership in the public sector (Cabinet Office, 2001) emphasized the government's concern with this task. The paper stressed the concept of 'clarity of vision' — the capacity of the leadership to identify and focus on clear priorities for action. This concept is very similar in nature to what we have previously called strategic policy direction, with the proviso that the 'priorities' concerned are increasingly being expected to cover broader issues (which the council may have only limited statutory powers to influence) such as social exclusion, economic regeneration, community safety and environmental sustainability — with traditional service responsibilities becoming relatively less dominant (with the notable exception of education). This change of emphasis, from service provision to the wider challenges of community leadership, although it has developed a certain momentum over the past 10 years, is still not easy for traditional leaders of all parties to come to terms with. In urban England, running a good housing service has typically been a higher and more tangible priority than dealing with social exclusion.

Is there likely to be any difference in the emphasis given by elected mayors and non-mayoral leaders to this priority? For one sub-group of elected mayors, the answer is likely to be yes. The two independent mayors elected in May 2002 (Ray Mallon in Middlesbrough and Stuart Drummond in Hartlepool) both conducted campaigns in which a particular 'broader issue' was emphasized: in the first case 'law and order'; and in the second 'the needs of young people'. Stuart Drummond identified the latter issue as his personal mayoral portfolio, and (sensibly) allocated the more traditional service responsibilities to other members of his all-party cabinet. Ray Mallon is similarly likely to take executive responsibility for his particular interest. The election of independent mayors is a reminder, as Sweeting (2002: 18) notes, that the position of mayor is a personal one 'and need not be tied to party' and that in such circumstances 'a focus beyond party is needed to understand local political leadership'.

The fact that both Mallon and Drummond are likely to take responsibility for broader issues does not necessarily mean a 'capacity to focus on clear priorities for action'.

Indeed, given their specific interests, a more comprehensive approach to strategic policy is perhaps unlikely. The gaps may be filled by cabinet colleagues but, given the circumstances (an all-party cabinet in Hartlepool; a largely hostile majority Labour group in Middlesbrough), it is by no means certain that a coherent approach to a wide range of local problems will materialize.

Such an approach is more likely in Lewisham, where the successful mayoral candidate, Steve Bullock, has a track record for commitment to a wider agenda (see Bullock, 2002) and in Newham. In North Tyneside, the Conservative mayor soon identified as his priority the need to sort out the authority's grim financial position (very much an 'internal' issue). The overall conclusion seems to be that the likelihood of an enhanced emphasis on strategic policy direction in the mayoral option depends very much on the background and predilections of the individual mayor. Where there is no experience of a 'service' emphasis, the wider strategic perspective hoped for by the government becomes more likely, but it may involve a very partial and personal set of priorities.

For the non-mayoral leader, much will depend on the traditions of the authority and the particular attitude of the leader. Has the authority and/or the leader enthusiastically embraced the 'community leadership' role or merely paid lip service to it? Encouragingly, there are several examples of leaders in this model taking as a personal portfolio not a traditional service issue, but rather a wider cross-cutting urban issue such as economic regeneration. There are also leaders whose past enthusiasm for corporate strategy (or more recently community strategy) leads logically into a leadership role in relation to the 'strategic policy direction' task. Thus, divisions of labour are possible in which the leader takes responsibility for one or more cross-cutting issues and cabinet colleagues hold responsibility for specific services. However, there are many examples of leaders whose portfolio is more traditional in nature (e.g. with a finance emphasis). The advantage for a leader in the cabinet and leader model who takes on elements of the broader strategic agenda is that this move will probably result in him or her being less constrained by 'the views of the party group', which would normally be focused more on the specific service responsibilities of the council, rather than the wider 'community leadership' agenda.

Representing the authority in the external world

There is, of course, a connection between the previous leadership task — strategic policy direction — and that of external representation. Insofar as a leader develops a strategic agenda which requires the cooperation of other agencies, then that leader is inevitably drawn into the process of external networking. If 'community leadership' issues are given less emphasis, then the need for external networking decreases correspondingly. As already noted, there is a clear expectation on the part of the Labour government that leadership priorities will change to give a new emphasis to community leadership, networking, partnerships, etc., detaching political leadership from party group politics and moving the approach to local decision-making more towards the southern European tradition of political leadership. But will it happen?

There is clearly the potential for this change to occur, particularly in relation to the mayoral option. If mayors have been elected on the basis of a programme which emphasizes 'cross-cutting' issues, then with the weight of public support behind them and the lack of dependency on the support of a particular party group or groups there is an opportunity to effectively be strengthened in this leadership mode. But as we have seen, much depends on the predisposition of the elected mayor. The expectations surrounding the position are not in themselves enough to generate such behaviour.

There are two further potential limitations to the development of this role which are explored in more detail in the final section of this article as they are crucial to the central argument. The first is that there is a lack of statutory backing to the 'community leadership' role. Very little in the way of levers or bargaining tools have been established to give an edge to the effective performance of this role. The enhanced

'democratic legitimacy' of an elected mayor will be of limited impact if other local stakeholders choose to ignore attempts at influence/leadership. Secondly, there is little in the way of an established tradition of 'community leadership' in English localities. Partly because of the long-term perception of local authorities as self-sufficient service providers and the associated interpretation of leadership as a largely internal task (maintaining group and organizational cohesion, ensuring task accomplishment), there has been little reason, until the second half of the 1980s, for local agencies — private, public or voluntary sector — to accept a local authority's leadership role, which was until recently rarely explicitly sought anyway. Unlike the French mayoral tradition, therefore, there is little in the way of established expectations and ways of working to suggest such an approach. Leaders — whether mayoral or non-mayoral — will have to convince other agencies of its appropriateness.

The challenge of overcoming the lack of legislative muscle and the lack of tradition applies equally, of course, to non-mayoral leaders who lack in addition much of the (theoretical) leadership legitimacy of a mayor, reflecting their indirect as opposed to direct election. What many of them do have is a degree of experience of trying to operate an externally-oriented community leadership role. In urban England the reality is that the weakening service provision role of local authorities since the mid-1980s has inspired an increased emphasis on external representation in many authorities. As Cole and John (2001) point out, the aspirations have often been there. What has limited the success of these aspirations has been not just the strength of the party group system, but also the lack of legislative and cultural support.

Ensuring task accomplishment

Task accomplishment will continue to be of importance in both mayoral and non-mayoral systems. Elections are won and lost (or are perceived to be) on the basis, not of elegant strategies, but of results, namely 'what happens on the ground'. In this context, the elected mayor has an advantage. He or she can decide which executive decisions to hold responsibility for (and hence can claim personal credit in a subsequent election). There is also the opportunity to require cabinet colleagues to consult with the mayor over certain types of high-profile executive decisions.

Interestingly, there has been wariness in authorities which have adopted the cabinet and leader model about allocating individual decision-making responsibilities to cabinet members, including the leader. The tradition of collective responsibility (at least in formal terms) for decisions has proved resilient, strengthened by fears of individual surcharge. In addition, central government advice has been that authorities should delegate more decisions than was previously the case to officers to avoid cabinet overload. Thus, although it would be possible for an equivalent degree of individual responsibility for decision-making to be established in non-mayoral models, there has been little evidence in urban England that such opportunities are being taken. The effect of this will be to weaken the role of individual leadership and to reduce the scope for 'ensuring task accomplishment' on the part of an administration (although there is always the possibility of 'informal' political influence on officers who have formal delegated responsibilities).

The mayor/council manager option

As noted earlier, the mayor/council manager option, although possible under the terms of the 2000 Act, is unlikely to have much appeal to politicized authorities of any description. By mid-2003 only one authority, Stoke-on-Trent, had adopted it. This model reduces the formal power of the key politician (the directly elected mayor) to that of adviser to a non-elected permanent officer (the manager), in whom executive authority is vested (subject to policies, budgets and major decisions being approved by

the assembly). There are, however, two sets of circumstances in which the elected mayor-council manager option may prove acceptable (or the least undesirable of the available options). The first and most likely situation is an urban authority in which party politics is a relatively low-key affair, with independents holding a significant proportion of the seats, and group discipline in those party groups that do exist being much looser than in a party politicized local authority. The second situation in which a directly elected mayor-council manager may be preferred is that of a hung authority, in which no two parties show any predisposition to work together in a joint administration and where, as a result, there is the problem of 'forming a cabinet' that can operate effectively. In particular, there would be considerable scope for disagreement within the cabinet to spill over into the assembly, with an aggrieved minority of cabinet members seeking to overturn in assembly a cabinet recommendation that they did not support. In these circumstances, there may just be an acknowledgement that an elected mayor-council manager model would at least facilitate the flow of council business. The elected mayor and council manager would know that they had to informally negotiate an adequate level of support within the assembly for all major recommendations. The elected mayor's role would greatly depend on his/her ability to influence sufficient members of a divided assembly in support of his/her preferences. Alternatively, such a leader could be rendered effectively powerless, with the external representation role the dominant — and possibly only — area in which leadership could be exercised.

The wider impact of the move to executive leadership

England now has a system of empowered political executives in all urban authorities which have for the first time the opportunity to introduce 'elected mayors' (with the consent of local populations). Are there any indications that these new structures will transform the exercise of power at local level, improve dynamism in policy-making, increase the popularity of local government, improve its ability to extract resources from the centre and remedy the decline in local voter turnout?

At the time of writing, local authorities (GLA apart) have operated under their new constitutions for less than a year. It will be some time before there is reliable evidence about which (if any) of these scenarios have been achieved. There are, however, indications from the turnout figures that neither executives in general, nor elected mayors in particular, have remedied the recent decline in local voting turnout. Turnouts for the 30 mayoral referenda were lower than average local electoral turnout, in some cases markedly so (e.g. only 9.8% in Ealing and 10% in Sunderland). Electoral turnout in the 2002 elections was hardly different from previous years (general election shared dates excepted), and where it did increase the major influence seems to have been the extension of postal voting opportunities rather than the form of executive arrangements adopted. In the May 2002 elections, turnout in authorities holding mayoral elections was, on average, no higher than in those which were not, varying from 24.7% in Lewisham to 41.3% in Middlesbrough and an overall average of 32.27%.

However, this disappointing level of public enthusiasm may change if elected mayors can demonstrate a capacity to 'make a difference' in ways which other leaders and regimes have not. Perhaps the crucial test in this respect will be the performance of Ray Mallon in Middlesbrough. His candidature generated a level of interest not experienced elsewhere. As a former senior police officer he led a 'zero tolerance' approach to crime in the area (with some apparent success) but then lost the confidence of his superiors (and indeed became subject to a series of disciplinary charges). The level of support for him as elected mayor in the Middlesbrough 2002 election: (62.78% in favour) and the turnout (41.34%) was considerably higher than anywhere else in England. His electoral success in a traditional Labour town (which at the same election returned a Labour-dominated council) suggested a high level of public expectation about his ability to 'crack down on crime', a major policy priority for local people. If he

can do so, it will send out signals to other towns and cities that the new mayoral position can have a real impact on local problems (a similar expectation and challenge faces Ken Livingstone with regard to traffic congestion in London). If he cannot, then the value of the elected mayor option becomes more questionable, not just in Middlesbrough but elsewhere.

Ray Mallon also provides the first indication that in certain circumstances the impact of traditional political culture can be challenged. In nearby Hartlepool there was a similar outcome, although the background of the candidate — the mascot of the local football club — could hardly be more different. In neither case would it have necessarily been predicted that the requisite number of voters would have deserted their traditional political allegiances and voted for an 'independent' candidate. If in either case the mayor 'delivers' in relation to an issue of concern to local people, then this could set an important precedent for other cities and towns.

The problem for both independent mayors — and particularly for Ray Mallon — is the level of antipathy his success (and indeed the nature of his acceptance speech) generated within the dominant party on the council. Given the division of responsibilities between executive and council set out in the 2000 Act, and the series of checks and balances referred to earlier (overview and scrutiny, key decisions, call-in powers, powers of assembly to decide decisions which are outside the policy framework), a determined Labour-dominated council has a range of opportunities to frustrate an unwanted elected mayor who has little experience of the complexities of local government decision-making processes. There is a real possibility that mayoral power may to a significant extent be neutralized.

There is a similar potential problem for the Conservative elected mayor in South Tyneside where there was a Labour majority on the council. Elsewhere the extent to which the exercise of power is transformed may be much less marked. In Newham, Lewisham, Doncaster and Hackney there is the opportunity for relationships between leader and majority group to continue along traditional lines, despite the enhanced formal authority and legitimacy of the leader. The leaders have appointed party colleagues to cabinet positions (a power not necessarily available to leaders in the 'cabinet and leader' model) but there may then develop a way of working which is not dissimilar to previous practice.

Will the presence of elected mayors improve the ability of authorities to extract resources from the centre (Borraz and John, this issue)? The introduction of local executives (mayoral or otherwise) has not been accompanied by any new levers of influence with regard to external bodies, including central government. There is an expectation that other bodies will respond to the prestige and authority of an elected mayor, but no guarantee that they will do so. As noted earlier, there is little tradition of local political leaders in England using the authority of their formal position to extract resources through central-local networks (unlike the situation in France, where many local mayors are also members of the National Assembly). Thus, there is a real possibility, for example, that any attempt by Ray Mallon to persuade his former colleagues in the Cleveland Police Force to support a personally-developed programme to combat crime may meet with an uncooperative response. There is no statutory requirement that a local authority's major partners — whether police authority, health authority, private sector or voluntary sector — should follow the lead of an elected mayor, nor does an elected mayor have much in the way of bargaining counters in such negotiations. The comparative literature suggests that mayors in France and Italy typically use their informal contacts (rather than their formal role) to extract resources from the centre (though the formal role provides a requisite basis). It is difficult to see how this informal way of working could be developed in England.

A central government committed to the spread of elected mayors could, of course, take steps to ensure that elected mayors were able to extract resources from the centre by finding ways of channelling additional resources to such authorities, on whatever pretext it felt it could justify. However, it is uncertain how far the commitment to elected mayors, first expressed in *Modern Local Government: In Touch with the People*

(DETR, 1998), has been sustained. In these circumstances it is unlikely that many additional local authorities will opt to hold referenda on the introduction of elected mayors. The vast majority of local authorities are much more comfortable with the 'cabinet and leader' model which poses much less of a threat to local political culture (and in particular the role of the party group) than elected mayors. Although there is some formal strengthening of the leadership position, it is the 'cabinet and leader' model which most authorities have chosen to operate, albeit in limited vein (e.g. the retention of the right of the council to appoint the cabinet; the limited extent to which authorities have chosen to take advantage of the opportunity to delegate individual decision-making responsibility to cabinet-members, including leaders). Indeed, in many authorities the introduction of new executives has had a much more limited effect on decision-making processes than might have been expected. In practice, cabinets often act in a similar way to the old Policy and Resources Committees (albeit with an enhanced range of responsibility).

Conclusion: radical or incremental change?

What is likely to be the overall impact of the introduction of executives — both mayoral and non-mayoral — in English urban local government? Will the initiative result in local government embracing a more 'southern' European-style leadership pattern that is more visible to the public and able to broker with central government (Borraz and John, this issue)? The argument in this article is that there are certainly opportunities in the institutional changes for a move in this direction, but also a whole range of obstacles.

First, by mid-2003 only eleven English local authorities had produced 'yes' votes in local referenda on the introduction of elected mayors, despite this option being the clear government preference. Ninety-eight percent of all English authorities opted either for 'cabinet and leader' models or the 'fourth option' (if they qualify). Within these models it is much easier to maintain traditional leader/party group relationships and, as a result, the task of ensuring party group cohesiveness is likely to continue to be a major priority, thus reducing time and energy for arguably more important leadership tasks such as strategic direction and external representation and networking. There will be leaders who succeed in giving priority to these tasks, as there were under the old system, but they cannot ignore the need to ensure continued party group support. Elected mayors are less dependent on such support patterns to sustain themselves in office, but are vulnerable to considerable delaying and preventative actions by an unsympathetic council. The way the legislation has developed means that mayors have less freedom of action than would have been anticipated from the original policy statements.

The central-government inspired pressure to engage in external networking, partnership and brokerage to either extract resources from regional, central or European governmental agencies, or to persuade local partners to cooperate in leader-inspired activities of economic, environmental or social benefit to the area, is there for all councils and all leaders. It could be argued that elected mayors are better placed, and in some cases more predisposed, to prioritize these roles than non-mayoral leaders. They certainly have the enhanced legitimacy to do so that stems from their direct election. However, their ability to operate in this model may well be hampered by the lack in England of a traditional pattern whereby local stakeholders are prepared to 'follow the lead' of a local leader, however designated, unless there are clear financial advantages in doing so. Such a tradition may develop but it is likely to do so only slowly. In addition, there is the problem that little in the way of sanctions or incentives has been provided for local leaders who wish to influence either local or national agencies. The 'community leadership' legislation, although full of worthy objectives, lacks the levers that would enable the role to be effectively carried out by elected mayors or leaders of cabinets. There is a perhaps unwarranted assumption that such agencies will be predisposed to be influenced.

Thus, the final conclusion is that the future progress of the move to a more 'southern-European' style of local leadership lies with the current Labour government. They could demonstrate a responsiveness to the lobbying of elected mayors (vis-à-vis other local leaders) which convinces non-mayoral authorities that there is good reason to adopt that form of local leadership. They could remove some of the constraints to executive initiative which are currently embodied in the legislation. In particular, they could provide local authorities with a range of levers of influence (financial or otherwise) which strengthen their capacity to persuade other local stakeholders to follow their lead. If these changes take place, the pace of change in England towards a 'southern European' form of urban leadership is likely to accelerate. If they do not, progress is likely to be slower — and, indeed, the whole initiative may be thwarted by the resilience of key features of the 'northern European' model, not least the resilience and power of the party group.

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