

Blog: Who's for elected mayors? Certainly not the prospective shadows

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It takes quite a determined political masochist to design a policy that unites in opposition to it 100% of those most immediately affected, regardless of party. Yet Communities Secretary Eric Pickles would seem to have pulled it off with his Localism Bill's elected mayoral package: first, forcing big city authorities to hold and pay for mayoral referendums; second, requiring existing leaders to become interim shadow mayors; and third, proposing they become in effect chief executives as well.

Of the current leaders of the 'Big 12' cities, 8 are Labour, 3 Liberal Democrat, and 1 Conservative. Their views and particular concerns vary, as does the intemperance of their language. But, apart from Leicester, who are bypassing the Bill's procedures and electing their mayor this May, support for mayors even as political, let alone managerial, leaders of their authorities is pretty well zero.

In Birmingham, Conservative Mike Whitby is a long-standing opponent of elected mayors, who has already had to listen to his party leader both enthusing about them and openly wondering if "a candidate from outside the existing political machine" might be best suited to the role. **Coventry's John Mutton (Labour)** strongly opposes any merging of mayoral and CE roles, and, should he stand, his chief motivation may well be to stop local MP and former Defence Secretary, Bob Ainsworth, from furthering his lately discovered interest in the city's local government. **Ian Greenwood (Labour)** argues that a city as socially, culturally and economically diverse as Bradford requires collective, not individual, leadership, and notes, with others, that the legislation was already in place to allow a referendum, had Bradford citizens wanted one. **Nottingham's Jon Collins (Labour)** is still more direct: "it's a stupid policy; it was stupid when Labour proposed it, it's stupid now. I will do all I can to avoid becoming the shadow elected mayor."

In Newcastle and Sheffield, both major parties, Lib Dems and Labour, are opposed. **In Newcastle, David Faulkner (LD)** plans to campaign for a No vote in the referendum, and **Sheffield's Paul Scriven (LD)** sees mayors as "a complete distraction" – obviously from more than just his YouTube singing career, remarkable though that is. The third Lib Dem council, Bristol, has changed leaders more frequently than most in recent years. Perhaps partly as a result, the city's recent public – if limited and unscientific – consultation produced a strong majority in favour of an elected mayor. But the council and **Barbara Janke** herself are opposed.

Leeds' similarly low key public consultation also produced a small pro-mayoral majority, but the Leader, the slightly confusingly named **Keith Wakefield (Labour)**, has declared he would rather resign than be turned overnight into a mayor. Meanwhile, in Wakefield, **Peter Box (Labour)** dismissed the policy as "a complete and utter shambles", noting that experiences at nearby Doncaster have hardly helped the mayoral cause. There is a concern too in Yorkshire about the potentially divisive implications of there being possibly three elected mayors in the 11-authority, county-wide Leeds City Region Partnership.

Liverpool's Joe Anderson (Labour) goes further, proposing that any elected mayor should run the whole Liverpool City Region, while in Manchester, with the new Greater Manchester Combined Authority already promised more powers over transport, housing, economic development, skills and job creation, a city mayor seems pretty irrelevant – or, as **Sir Richard Leese (Labour)** puts it, an obsession of Mr. Pickles.

Powers are, of course, the key, and at least some of these views may change when ministers finally decide what additional powers elected mayors may be offered, but, as things stand, they're going to have to be pretty tasty.

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