

Accountability in metropolitan government: the case of Greater London

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Abstract: Conflicting ideas about accountability can be found in contrasting prescriptions for metropolitan government. These prescriptions are assessed by a historical look at Greater London. This area has been changed from a two-tier structure of government to a single tier and back to a two-tier with the latest reform. Following the abolition of metropolis-wide government in 1986 the predictions of the metropolitan planning model about public accountability were confirmed: centralisation, weak accountability and public confusion about decision-making responsibilities. However, the form of metropolitan government introduced by the 1999 reform does not include clear accountability. The creation of a metropolitan tier of government does not guarantee equal measures of answerability, responsibility and transparency.

Key words: metropolitan government, accountability, Greater London

1. Introduction

In this paper a controversy surrounding political accountability in metropolitan government will be explored. A particular case will be examined, that of Greater London. This metropolitan area is of particular interest currently, as it is in the process of reorganisation designed, among other things, to improve the accountability of government in the metropolis to its citizens. The paper comments on this reorganisation and assesses its probable outcomes in respect of accountability.

Since the recent history of London's government has alternated between a two tier and a single tier system it seemed sensible to structure the analysis by the use of two theories of how the decentralised government of large urban areas should be organised. The system about to be introduced and based on new legislation (the 1999 Greater London Authority Act) returns local government in the metropolis to a system with a single strategic authority for the whole of the Greater London area after a 14 year period during which governmental powers were devolved either to the constituent Boroughs into which the area was divided in 1963 or special purpose bodies for functions which could not be divided.

2. Theories of urban government structure

There are two conflicting theories about how the government of metropolitan areas should be organised. One, that I shall call the 'metropolitan planning model', argues for a political authority to manage some governmental functions for the whole of the metropolitan area. The other, referred to here as the 'fragmented model', argues for a

fragmented structure of political authorities despite the existence of a large urban area whose parts are economically integrated.

2.1. Metropolitan planning

Ideas about metropolitan planning apply to large urban concentrations or conurbations. The theory is that a governmental authority with a jurisdiction covering the whole of the metropolis is needed for the planning and administration of services which have to be planned, delivered and co-ordinated across the whole of the urbanised area. One of the claims made for the metropolitan model is that there is a risk of losing democratic control and accountability when there is no political body directly responsible for metropolitan-wide problems. Functions that need to be planned and administered on a metropolitan scale are likely, in the absence of a directly elected council, to be handed to ad hoc agencies appointed by the centre (Self, 1982: 65).

This facet of the metropolitan model is supported by the argument that large units of sub-national government can enhance local democracy. Case studies have shown that large-scale urban government can generate forms of political participation, access to political leaders, political identity, and attitudes to elected representatives, political parties and public services that are as good as those found in small communities. Big urban communities may even provide more opportunities for political mobilization in all sectors of society and make elected leaders more representative of society as a whole than small-scale communities. So it cannot be assumed, at least for urban areas, that small-scale government is necessary for extensive participation, responsive decision-making and firm accountability (Newton, 1982).

The hypothesis that can be derived from such theorising is that democracy and accountability are strengthened by the existence of a metro-wide political institution.

2.2. The fragmented model

The public choice school of political economy advocates a very different scale of operations for metropolitan government. Building on the characteristics of municipal services which correspond to public goods (non-rival consumption and non-excludability), public choice theory offers a prescriptive statement about the structure of government in large urban concentrations (see Tiebout, 1956; Ostrom, 1972; Bish and Ostrom, 1973).

In this approach to the design of metropolitan government, the pattern of areas is seen as crucial for the responsiveness of local officials to service users and therefore electorates. Increasing the number of governmental units and their levels of specialization is said to reduce the problem of registering 'demand' for public goods and make it easier for people to participate in the system. Expenditure decisions can more easily be related to resource costs in smaller jurisdictions. Larger jurisdictions are said to increase the problems of bureaucracy, lack of innovation, political corruption and inefficiency.

However, the advantages of small-scale local government do not preclude the benefits of large scale in some circumstances. Maximising consumer preferences means defining different 'communities of users', some of which might be quite large, especially in metropolitan areas. The argument here is more concerned with the maximisation of

efficiency than accountability. Jurisdictions should correspond to the size of populations needed to internalize the beneficial externalities or spillover effects from the production of goods and services by collective means (Ostrom, Tiebout and Warren, 1961: 831–836).

In addition to variation in the size of ‘communities of users’ there is variation in the scales of production needed for different public goods and services. Consequently the maximisation of efficiency and consumer satisfaction points to a tiered structure of government in metropolitan areas. Larger authorities are needed for services of interest to larger communities of users and with large-scale production characteristics. Smaller lower-tier authorities can be created for services where communities of users and production characteristics require small-scale areas and operations.

The public choice approach does not necessarily assume that an upper tier, metropolitan-wide authority with its own elected government will be needed. Ostrom, Tiebout and Warren’s statement that ‘informal arrangements between public organisations may create a political community large enough to deal with any particular public’s problem’ (p. 836) implies stability in the formal structure of metropolitan government, but flexibility in inter-governmental relations to deal with the needs of different sub-sets of the population of a large urban area – what they refer to as a ‘polycentric political system’. This concept denotes many centres of decision-making which, though formally independent, nevertheless function inter-dependently through contractual and co-operative mechanisms or even through recourse to a large-scale, higher level organisation.

The economic case for small-scale jurisdictions is buttressed by the political argument that small communities experience better relationships between citizens and their elected representatives. The smaller the community being governed, the more accountable decision-makers will be to local electorates. The larger the community, the greater the problem of securing responsiveness, access and control. Participation is thought to be easier and therefore proportionately more widespread in smaller communities. Small-scale government enhances democracy (Dahl and Tufte, 1974; Sharpe, 1978; Dahl, 1981).

From this analysis it can be hypothesised that the division of decentralised powers between small jurisdictions within a metropolitan area will strengthen political accountability.

3. Government in Greater London

3.1. The Greater London Council 1963–86

The two models have been implicit at different times in the three major reorganisations of London’s government that have occurred since 1960¹. In 1960 a Royal Commission implicitly accepted the assumptions of the metropolitan planning model. It advocated that Greater London be divided into ‘primary units’ of local government, known as Boroughs. A single authority for the continuous urbanised area was needed for functions requiring such a scale of operations. The Commission claimed that functions such as town planning, highways, and ‘overspill’ housing were fragmented between too many authorities. It was convinced that the only options available for the reform of local government in greater

¹ Greater London is a metropolitan area covering 1578 square kilometres and with a population of over 7 millions. It is the most populous conurbation in the UK (Office for National Statistics, 1999: 166).

London were 'abdication in favour of central government' or the creation of a two-tier structure with a directly elected upper-tier authority to perform local government functions for the whole of the greater London area. Subjecting London's government to the 'twin tests of administrative efficiency and the health of representative government', it opted for the latter course because, among other reasons, power would be exercised on 'matters which Londoners are entitled to make their opinions felt through the medium of the ballot' (Herbert Report, 1960, para. 851). To ensure that a metropolis-wide view is taken, such representatives need to be directly elected rather than delegates of the lower-tier authorities whose functions are limited in geographical scope.

The Government of the day largely agreed with this line of thought and decided in 1961 to set up a new, directly elected local authority to administer functions that needed a scale of operations corresponding to the whole conurbation. On accountability the Government's view confirmed the values expressed in the Herbert Commission's report and accepted the argument for a directly elected authority to 'handle those issues that demand a comprehensive view of the whole area' (White Paper, 1961: 6). It also accepted that London needed to be divided into smaller parts for services needing knowledge of local conditions, such as housing, social services (especially for children in need) and environmental health. A two-tier structure was chosen.

In 1963 London's government was reorganised on the basis of 32 boroughs, the Corporation of the ancient City of London, and the Greater London Council (GLC). Electoral accountability was channelled through 100 directly elected councillors representing 32 electoral divisions (territorial constituencies) corresponding to the London Boroughs, each returning 2–4 councillors. GLC elections attracted slightly more interest than London Borough elections (for the lower-tier authorities), though neither produced turnouts that involved even half the electorate. The average turnout for GLC elections from 1964 to 1981 (the full number of elections held) was 42 per cent. Over the same period turnout in Borough elections averaged 36.5 per cent. This limited accountability does not, however, necessarily indicate dissatisfaction with local government in Greater London. In 1985, the year before the GLC was abolished, an opinion survey found that 70 per cent of Londoners thought that London's governments ran things well – very well or fairly well (Young, 1986: 39). Four years after abolition of the GLC this had risen to 73 per cent (Bloch and John, 1991: 13).

3.2. Fragmentation 1986–2000

In 1985 a Conservative Government, hostile to the policies of the Labour-controlled GLC, decided to abolish it along with the other (Labour controlled) metropolitan county councils (Barlow, 1992: 93–97). Accountability did not figure very largely in this policy change. The Government's policy statement was more concerned with functions and the lack of those which in their opinion needed to be administered on a metropolitan scale (White Paper, 1983).

However, the abolition of the GLC in 1986 did not create a fragmented system that would satisfy the requirements of the public choice model. The remaining London boroughs were large units of government in terms of population, ranging in size from 133.9 thousands (Kingston-upon-Thames) to 319 thousands (Croydon). As predicted by the metropolitan model a number of functions had to continue on a metropolitan scale, and

were handed to ad hoc bodies, appointed wholly or partly by central government, and responsible for transport, the South Bank arts complex, voluntary sector funding, industrial training, museums and institutes, historic buildings and sports projects. Central government took over the distribution of housing capital and strategic land-use planning. Other functions were organised, as predicted by the fragmented model, by joint boards made up from representatives of the constituent London boroughs. These ad hoc bodies, not the lower-tier governments, accounted for the bulk of the expenditure formerly the responsibility of the GLC. Other functions were managed by voluntary joint committees.

This complex and fragmented 'middle tier' machinery proved cumbersome in its response to changing circumstances. The constituent boroughs at best tolerated it and at worst sought to weaken it. Disagreements between the boroughs made it easy for central government to impose its policies, notably in the case of concessionary fares on public transport for elderly, blind and handicapped people which allowed London Transport to push charges up steeply (James, 1990).

The findings for Greater London and the other metropolitan areas seem to undermine some of the theoretical claims of public choice theory. The 1986 reorganisation represented a dilution of the democratic process. Public accountability was weakened. The accountability of the indirectly elected joint boards to their Borough electorates was extremely limited (Leach, 1987: 45). Opinion surveys revealed a high level of public confusion about the distribution of responsibilities in all the metropolitan areas after 1986 (Game, 1987). Analysis led to the 'inescapable conclusion' that since abolition the system had become less clearly understood and there had been a marked reduction in accountability (Leach 1990; Davis, 1990).

If a fragmented system were to provide greater accountability, one might expect to find the smaller scale jurisdictions providing more opportunities for public participation beyond periodic general and by-elections to fill council seats. However, there is scant evidence of this for the London Boroughs.

Seven Boroughs hold Question Times at Council or Committee meetings and four allow other contributions from the public, in two cases at neighbourhood committees and in one at a Council Forum to which the public can submit petitions, questions and motions for debate. One has set up scrutiny panels for policy areas such as services for older people and business development which monitor and evaluate performance and to which the representatives of community organisations are invited. Another Borough involves community groups in advisory committees to discuss policies and proposals on the environment, transport, libraries, open spaces, the arts, and the young before decisions are made. Three councils run focus groups or citizens' panels to obtain the views and opinions of residents. Most councils hold public meetings, carry out surveys and administer questionnaires from time to time. One allows councillors sitting on scrutiny commissions to invite residents and interest groups to submit evidence.

As a single Borough may use a range of such devices for public participation and consultation, the total number of councils involved is small – probably 12 out of the 32 Borough in Greater London.² A metropolitan local government structure consisting solely

² This data should be taken as suggestive rather than conclusive as it is based on a rapid survey of Websites which may not provide comprehensive information.

of authorities for districts within the metropolis is thus not guaranteed to offer good access to decision making for its residents and community groups.

4. The Greater London authority

Pressure to restore a government for the metropolis was sustained until the last General Election when the Labour Party pledged to introduce reforms. Having won the election in 1997 it presented its thoughts on how London should be governed, first in a consultative document later that year on *New Leadership for London*, and then in a policy statement, or White Paper, in 1998. *New Leadership for London* concluded that unemployment, poverty, economic regeneration and environmental threats needed to be tackled by a single, democratically elected body with policy making powers (DETR, 1997). Much emphasis was placed on the need in Greater London for strategic direction and leadership, but it was also stressed that a 'new style of politics' needed to be 'above all, democratic and accountable' (White Paper, 1998: p. 8). The post of executive mayor was to provide leadership, co-ordination, an 'overall vision for London', and accountability to Londoners. A new elected assembly for Greater London covering the area of the 32 boroughs and the square mile of the ancient City of London (London's financial district) would be given an explicit accountability remit to scrutinize the activities of the Mayor and executive agencies. One of its prime duties would be to 'hold the Mayor to account on London's behalf'. The Assembly would also bring 'a greater democratic accountability' to the delivery of public services by new independent authorities to be set up for the police and fire service. Taken together, the aims of the new Greater London Authority (Mayor plus Assembly) are to fill 'democratic and organisational deficits' and 'give power to the people' (pp. 9–10). Similar sentiments were expressed by Government Ministers and supporters in Parliament³.

Following publication of the White Paper and a publicity campaign, a referendum was held in May 1998. Support among those who voted was strong, with 72 per cent in favour of a new authority for Greater London and with every Borough returning a majority in support. Interest in the issue itself, however, was disappointingly low, with only 34.6 per cent of the electorate bothering to vote.

4.1. The new structure

The reorganisation, embodied in The Greater London Authority Act, 1999, involves the creation of a new Greater London Authority (GLA), consisting of two institutions, the Mayor of London and the London Assembly, covering the whole of the Greater London Area⁴. The Assembly will be elected every four years at the same time as the Mayor. The first elections were held in May, 2000.

The London Boroughs remain as the lower tier of the new structure. They will continue to be responsible for the delivery of their existing services, although in land-use planning

³ Hansard, House of Commons, 14 December 1998, vol. 322, cols. 633–34; Hansard, House of Lords, 20 May 1999, vol. 601, col. 438.

⁴ As defined by the London Government Act, 1963.

local development plans will have to conform to the Mayor's 'Spatial Development Strategy'. The Mayor has also been made a statutory consultee for planning applications of strategic importance and will have the power to direct Boroughs to refuse planning permission to developers when he or she considers it necessary on strategic grounds. Waste disposal and collection operations and air quality management by the Boroughs can also be directed to comply with the Mayor's strategies. Borough councils must prepare and implement a local implementation plan, subject to the Mayor's approval, containing their proposals for putting the Mayor's transport strategy into effect.

The Boroughs will account, on the basis of 1997–98 figures, for approximately 75 per cent of local government expenditure in Greater London. The approximation is necessitated by the complexity of the financial arrangements to be inherited by the new GLA, varying from function to function. The new Authority's resources, apart from central government grants, will consist of a share of the revenue from business rates, fees, charges and Council Tax. Where a service that was not part of local government is transferred to the GLA, its funding will be in the form of a specific grant (or credit approval in the case of capital expenditure). Shares of Council Tax will be raised by precepts on the lower-tier local authorities in the area served by the GLA. These will include replacements for the existing precepts⁵ for the fire service, the police and other London-wide services which the GLA will take over.

A number of statutory bodies will be absorbed into the GLA: the London Planning Advisory Committee, the London Research Centre, the London Ecology Unit and the London Pensions Fund Authority. But two other bodies which were considered for inclusion in the reorganisation – the London Borough Grants Committee, which dispenses grants to voluntary bodies addressing deprivation in two or more Boroughs, and the Lea Valley Regional Park Authority – remain outside the GLA, and the London Ambulance Service has been left within the National Health Service.

Under Section 30 (1) of the 1999 Act the GLA is given the power to do anything which it considers will further any of its 'principle purposes', defined as promoting economic development, wealth creation, social development and the improvement of the environment in Greater London. This sounds remarkably like a 'general competence' and is most unusual for British local government. However, it is also clear from the statute that the GLA may not exercise any of its functions so as to duplicate the powers of other public bodies (e.g. local housing authorities); and, as a body corporate, its powers are confined to those expressly or by implication conferred on it. There is undoubtedly scope for conflict between competing authorities here, which will not assist the cause of public accountability.

5. The potential for accountability

Despite the prominence given in policy statements (and during the passage of the legislation) to the revitalisation of democratic accountability in the governance of Greater

⁵ A precept is a share of Council Tax collected by the 'charging' authorities (in London the Boroughs) for other bodies such as upper tier authorities (e.g. the GLA).

London, there are reasons to be sceptical about the likely outcome of the current reorganisation, which took effect on 3 July 2000, in this respect.

5.1. Representation

First, the new elected council for Greater London, the London Assembly, will have only 25 members for a metropolis with a population of over 7 million and an electorate (in 1996) of 5.5 million. Of these 14 will represent constituencies made up of two or three London Boroughs. Voters will have a 'constituency vote' and a 'London vote'. This means that each constituency member (elected by the simple majority system – i.e. 'first past the post') will be expected to be answerable to and somehow represent the interests of on average 500,000 people or nearly 400,000 eligible voters. The remaining 11 seats will be filled by a second vote, this time for a political party, and will be allocated to ensure that the overall distribution of seats reflects the proportion of votes cast for each party (or independent candidates if there are any). These 11 members have to represent London as a whole. In such a manner is the 'democratic' deficit in the governance of Greater London to be made up.

5.2. Legislation

Secondly, the Assembly is only empowered to act as a forum where political or expert views and interests can be aired and issues debated. It can *scrutinise* the activities of the Mayor and other public bodies in Greater London, and *investigate* such matters as environmental problems or health issues on its own initiative. But it cannot *decide* anything. It will be able to question the Mayor and his or her staff, hold public hearings and consult with different sections of the community such as ethnic minorities, trade unions, young people, women's groups and the small business sector. In addition to setting up ordinary committees, the Assembly can create advisory committees, not necessarily composed of elected members but bringing outsiders in⁶. But it is the role of the Mayor to propose strategies and deliver them. It is the role of the Assembly to question and call to account.

The Assembly will be entitled to summon the Mayor, officials of the Authority and its agencies (see below), and the representatives of organisations receiving grants or contracts from the Authority. The Mayor must attend ten special meetings of the Assembly each year to answer questions. However, advice received by the Mayor from officials will remain confidential. During the passage of the legislation through the House of Lords the under Secretary of State described the Mayor's relationship to the administrative agencies and the advice they give as comparable to that between Ministers and civil servants: 'the Mayor is more equivalent to Ministers than he or she is to local authority chairs and members'⁷. However, the Mayor is not required to seek the agreement of the Assembly, only to consult it and notify it of major decisions, with reasons. Monthly and annual reports have also to be made to it.

⁶ Section 55 (5).

⁷ Hansard, House of Lords, vol. 605, col. 552.

The Assembly's only sanction (and therefore its only 'legislative power') is to reject the Mayor's budget. The Mayor will be obliged to consider any proposals on the budget made by the Assembly and to respond to them. It is not intended that the Assembly should develop 'unreasonable' (the Government's term) powers to amend the budget. It can propose amendments which have the support of a simple majority of those voting. However, a vote to reject a budget which is not revised in accordance with such proposals requires the support of 66 per cent of those voting. Failing this, the budget will be taken as having been agreed. In the General Note to Section 41 of the Act it is admitted that 'it might be said that the Authority is the Mayor, as he (sic) is the only constituent element of the Authority with independent functions to exercise, whereas the Assembly's role is to monitor and scrutinise the exercise of those functions'.

The Government's White Paper on the new government for Greater London is explicit in specifying that the Assembly 'must be much more than a talking shop' (p. 9). But since any decision making power has been withheld on the grounds that it would otherwise be 'unreasonable', it is difficult to see how this elected body can amount to anything more than a talking shop. As a medium for accountability to the people of London it can only prove ineffectual. It does not even have the power to withhold the rubber stamp!

5.3. Executive power

This leads to a third concern about the reorganisation, one to do with the powers of the Mayor and his or her relationship with the London electorate. Extensive statutory and financial powers have been vested in one person who is to be directly elected every four years. The Mayor has been given wide powers to promote the economic and social development of Greater London and improve its environment. The Mayor has to decide policy, set the budget and produce strategies for each of the GLA's statutory responsibilities. The policy areas devolved to the GLA and for which the Mayor carries executive responsibility are all of immense significance to the well-being of the metropolis. They include transport, economic development and regeneration, the police, the fire service and emergency planning, culture and health. The Mayor is required to produce a physical planning strategy for the metropolis and respond to threats to the environment. The strategy will have statutory force within the planning system and will replace the regional planning guidance at present issued by the central government. Some powers previously exercised by central government have been devolved, including transport planning, trunk roads, and public transport. The allocation of funds for economic investment and regeneration are being transferred to a new economic development agency, answerable to the Mayor.

These powers are concentrated in one person notionally accountable to over 5 million electors. This arrangement has been described by the Government as part of a 'separation of powers' (White Paper, 1998: 23). Such a description usually denotes a relationship between an executive authority and a real legislative body which the London Assembly clearly is not, even in comparison with conventional local councils in the UK's system of local government. In fact the new 'constitution' for Greater London could be said to fuse powers in the office of Mayor, rather than separate them between the executive and legislative branches of government. It is difficult to see how accountability can be made

meaningful except in the minimal sense of a single vote every four years. This is unlikely to amount to much of a restraint on executive power in the metropolis.

Beyond this, accountability is seen exclusively in terms of openness, through such devices as monthly question times in the Assembly, twice yearly People's Question Times, performance indicators against which policy outputs and outcomes can be measured, an annual public debate on 'the state of London', and holding Assembly and committee meetings in public. In drawing up a planning strategy the Mayor is required to consult widely, including an Examination in Public before an independent chairperson or panel who will report back to the Mayor. There is nothing wrong with openness and consultation, but it needs to be recognised that this is all that the new democracy for Greater London amounts to apart from periodic elections.

5.4. Administrative accountability

Fourthly, the accountability of the Mayor to London's electorate is further weakened by the complex and variable relationships between the Mayor and the administrative bodies responsible for policy implementation. For one group of responsibilities the Mayor's role is only that of an 'enabler'. Influence will have to be exerted over other organisations not directly accountable to the Mayor nor, in some cases, to the people of London. The role is one based on leadership, encouragement, assistance and the production of numerous 'strategies' in policy areas in which the Mayor has varying degrees of power to intervene – an integrated transport strategy, a Spatial Development Strategy, an air quality strategy, a municipal waste management strategy, an ambient noise strategy, and so on. Great stress has been placed on working in partnership with other organisations responsible for aspects of Greater London's governance, notably the Boroughs, the business sector, voluntary bodies and community groups. In some matters such duty is bolstered by the right to nominate members to some bodies that are part of London's governance but not part of the GLA, such as the London Arts Board, the South Eastern Area Museums Council and the London Office of the national Sports Council. The Mayor has a duty to consider the implications of GLA decisions for other policy areas and even to promote improvements in policy outcomes in sectors where there is no executive role for the GLA. An example is health care. It is obvious that it will not be difficult to evade accountability for policies and outcomes arising from decisions taken by other statutory bodies and the non-governmental sectors, both commercial and not-for-profit.

Accountability is complex and unclear even in those areas where the Mayor has the statutory power to set budgets and decide policies. In these policy areas – transport, economic development, the police, and the fire service – accountability has been confused by the creation of different administrative relationships between the Mayor and the 'arms length' ad hoc agencies that have been set up to deliver services and that account for the vast majority of GLA expenditure. These functional agencies have their own executive boards and large staffs, which blur accountability and pose problems of control for the Mayor's relatively small office.

The two most important functions of London's new government, transport and economic development, are to be managed by executive agencies accountable to the Mayor who will appoint their board members. Transport for London (TfL), responsible for

devising on and implementing the Mayor's transport strategy and for the day-to-day management of transport services, including the London Underground and the GLA's road network, will be directly accountable to the Mayor. All the board members will be drawn from people with experience of public transport – in commerce, finance, management, organised labour and transport users. But there will be no political representatives, accountability being to the Mayor and from the Mayor to the electorate under Assembly scrutiny. The Assembly will be assisted in this by appointing a London Transport Users Committee to consider complaints from the public.

The London Development Agency, responsible for delivering the Mayor's economic strategy, will also be managed by a board appointed by the Mayor, predominantly composed of people with a business background but, unlike TfL, will have four of its 12–15 seats reserved for elected members drawn by the Mayor from the London Assembly. In addition to direct administrative functions, such as preparing reclaimed sites and allocating European Union structural funds, its role, unlike that of TfL, will largely be an enabling one, involving promoting, advising and facilitating action by other organisations.

The new police and fire agencies will be different again, and managed by indirectly elected board members. Organisationally they differ from each other as well as from transport and economic development. The police force in London has at last been given some semblance of democratic accountability in that, formerly run by the Home Office, it has been brought into line with other police forces in Britain by the creation of a Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) with a small majority of elected members (12 out of 23 and including the Deputy Mayor). However, the elected members are indirectly elected and chosen from the London Assembly by the Mayor rather than selected by their fellow Assembly members. The minority group of non-elected members will be appointed from among magistrates and politically independent people, 4 and 7 respectively. One of the independents will be appointed by the Home Secretary who will continue to recommend to the Queen the appointment of the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police (London's police chief). Although the Mayor will be able to set the budget for the police, the MPA has been empowered to set policing targets.

The new London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA) is different again in composition, although also indirectly elected. Its 17 members include 9 chosen by the Mayor from the Assembly and 8 nominated by the London Boroughs. Although the Mayor will set the LFEPA's budget the Authority will determine a strategy for the provision of fire services. The Authority will have its own statutory role and policy making powers to decide on priorities between local services, with the Home Secretary exercising powers under the Fire Services Act of 1947 to ensure that national standards are adhered to.

Clear accountability is further compromised by controls imposed by central government. The Mayor's powers to decide how to allocate the GLA's resources are limited by the requirement to use central grants and credit approvals only for the purposes specified by central government. Since most of the £3.3 billion per annum⁸ to be spent by the administrative agencies and £20 million by the rest of the GLA will be funded by specific grants, conflicting accountabilities will be introduced at another point in the system. Only a small percentage of total local government expenditure in Greater London

⁸ Based on 1997–98 expenditure net of receipts.

will be met from the local government tax (the Council Tax), which is supposed to 'give Londoners a direct financial interest in the efficiency of the Mayor and Assembly' (White Paper, 1998: 81). The Mayor will also have to keep public services in Greater London in line with centrally determined service standards, will be subject to any limits set by central government on council tax increases, and will not be able to reduce the budgets of the executive agencies below levels set by Ministers.

6. Conclusion

Developments following the abolition of a metropolis-wide government in 1986 confirmed the predictions of the metropolitan planning model about public accountability. Powers were not fragmented among small sub-divisions of the metropolitan area, but were handed to appointed bodies, central government and joint committees. These latter bodies did not function in ways that satisfy the requirements of the fragmented model, leading as they did to a complexity that did not strengthen accountability to local communities. Rather they led to further centralisation, weak accountability and public confusion about decision-making responsibilities.

The new system of government for Greater London shows how variable the organisation of local government in a metropolitan area can be. Whether the GLA will deliver the benefits of accountability sought by the current Government remains to be seen. Certainly the structure of accountability is far more complex and unclear than the protagonists of reorganisation would have us believe. In so far as responsibility is left unclear, so accountability is inevitably reduced. The creation of a metropolitan tier of government does not guarantee equal measures of answerability, responsibility and transparency. There is an attempt under the new legislation to provide more occasions on which accounts have to be given than has been customary in the past, and to improve the transparency of decision making in the metropolis. But concerns remain about the identification of responsibility.

This complex system of different lines of accountability and varying levels of policy making power exercised by the Mayor, agencies and central government, will be incomprehensible to most of the electorate who seek to understand it. It will almost certainly guarantee that accountability to Londoners will not be uppermost in the minds of those responsible for planning these important public services. The new administrative structure for Greater London runs all the risks of conflicting and obscure accountabilities inherent in the use of 'arms length' appointed bodies for the implementation of public policies. It might also compromise the effort to improve the quality of services in London and living conditions in the capital generally.

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ODPOVĚDNOST METROPOLITNÍ SAMOSPRÁVY: PŘÍKLAD VELKÉHO LONDÝNA

Résumé

Různé koncepce odpovědnosti voličům patří k alternativním principům metropolitní samosprávy. Tyto rozdíly jsou hodnoceny na příkladu historických zkušeností metropolitní samosprávy a správy Velkého Londýna. V této metropolitní oblasti byl změněn samosprávný systém dvou úrovní na systém s jednou úrovní a poslední reforma opět zavedla dvě úrovně územní samosprávy. Po zrušení systému dvou úrovní v roce 1986 se potvrdila očekávání týkající se charakteru veřejné odpovědnosti: centralizace rozhodování, slabá odpovědnost veřejnosti a nejasnosti týkající se specifické odpovědnosti orgánů samosprávy a správy. Avšak ani reforma z roku 1999 zavádějící opět metropolitní samosprávu a správu v metropolitním regionu Velkého Londýna nepřinesla jasnou strukturu odpovědnosti a nezajišťuje stejnou míru ručení, citlivosti a transparentnosti. Zavedení metropolitní úrovně samosprávy a správy vedlo k růstu složitosti v rozhodování a poklesu průhlednosti vertikální a horizontální koordinace.