

Dear Editor,

No doubt 'The Lifting the Burdens' Taskforce' announced by Ruth Kelly will be welcomed as a sea-change in the current relationship between central and local government. The taskforce signals a long awaited dialogue, between central and local government, not simply on the burdens of reporting but on the whole balance of centralist control over localised matters. 'Earned autonomy' to 'presumed autonomy' as Ms Kelly has stated.

For too long Councils have had to focus on providing statistical evidence of meeting centrally set targets with little correlation to local priorities. However a headlong rush to bin all targets will not necessarily be in the best interest of local government. We need to acknowledge that performance information has served a useful purpose in creating a cultural shift in management. In order to make progress councils must at least acknowledge where their baseline is. Without performance information it is difficult to assess what the direction of travel is.

The failure of the current target led system is that management information of itself will not create any improvements to services. However converting performance information into a performance management culture will further enhance the service improvements that we have already witnessed within local government.

If we are to 'bin the burdens' we must see a step change in local government whereby it becomes much more effective at performance management. This can only be achieved if councils are prepared to put in the leg work to ensure they have performance information – not to meet central targets - but to ensure that any presumed autonomy they are given creates an upward trajectory on service improvements.

I suspect reserve powers of intervention will be the quid quo pro for any new era of devolved powers. Intervention will quickly follow any council which fails to evidence their own performance and rightly so.



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