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Elected Mayors: Leading Locally?

John Fenwick and Howard Elcock

Introduction

The directly elected executive mayor has been with us in England for more than a decade. Drawing inspiration from European and American experience (see Elcock and Fenwick, 2007) the elected mayor has appealed to both Labour and Conservative commentators in offering a solution to perceived problems of local leadership. For the Left, it offered a reinvigoration of local democracy, a champion for the locality who could stand up for the community: in one early pamphlet, a Labour councillor envisaged that an elected mayor could "...usher in a genuinely inclusive way of doing civic business as well as giving birth to an institution that encourages and values people" (Todd, 2000: 25). For the Right, it offered the opportunity to cut through the lengthy processes of local democratic institutions by providing streamlined high-profile leadership. Although inconsistent in their expectations of what the new role of executive mayor would bring, Left and Right shared a view that leadership of local areas was failing. Despite the very low turnout in referendums on whether to adopt the system, and the very small number of local areas that have done so, the prospect of more executive mayors, with enhanced powers, refuses to exit the policy arena.

During 2012, the coalition government initiated mayoral referendums in England's ten largest cities. In only one case was there a public vote in favour of establishing a directly-elected executive mayor. However, sensing the local political opportunity, two cities – initially Leicester, then Liverpool – had pre-empted the referendum process by adopting the mayoral system by resolution of the council. Salford, following a different path, held a referendum initiated by public petition in January 2012, and also opted for the elected mayor model. Clearly, in policy terms, something is still going on. But what? This paper draws from a decade of research, completed by recent interviews with some of the newest mayors, to consider:

- Reasons for the persistence of the mayoral experiment, despite no evidence of any significant public support for this model of local governance
- An analysis of the political and managerial leadership represented by the directly elected mayor
- The unresolved relationship between the elected mayor and local place

Historical Context: the Search for Local Leadership within a Core Executive

Importing directly-elected executive mayors into local government in England, and potentially in Wales, is but one example of the long-standing search for an effective core executive in local councils: one that is capable of addressing the perceived failures of the old committee system including poor co-ordination, duplication of services, lengthy decision-making and wasted money and time (Elcock, 1996). The mayoral agenda has also been based on the implicit assumption that local authorities needed a clearly identifiable figurehead to engage with other actors involved in an increasingly 'hollowed out" (Rhodes, 1995) local governance. The search for viable core leadership can be traced back to the 1960s, with the Maud Committee's recommendation that local authorities should be governed by a Board of between 5 and 9 members (Maud Committee, 1967). This did not come to pass, but some councils did experiment with new management structures, including Newcastle City Council's appointment of a City Manager (Elliott, 1971; Foote-Wood, 2010) and Leeds City Council's appointment of a "troika" of three officers (the Clerk, the Treasurer and the City Engineer) to co-ordinate both policy and service provision. In the 1970s, the Bains Report (1972) proposed that a Policy and Resources Committee at political level should be formed to co-ordinate policy and service provision, while, at officer level, a Chief Executive Officer should lead a management team of departmental chief officers. Most of the new English local authorities formed in 1973 followed some or all of these recommendations. In the early 1990s, Michael Heseltine commissioned two reviews of English local government. The first reviewed its structure and led to the formation of the Local Government Commission for England which carried out an incremental, sometimes radical, reorganisation of the structure (Leach, 1998); see also Fenwick and Bailey (1998a, 1998b, 1999). The second was a working party on the internal management of local authorities, reporting initially in 1991 (DoE, 1991). Heseltine declared his enthusiasm for directly elected mayors in providing clear identifiable accountability and leadership. He also believed that the process of electing mayors would engage local voters and reverse the pattern of declining local turnout. Such interest generated, and to some extent was generated by, a growth of academic discussion of elected mayors overseas and how they might be instituted in England and Wales (Stoker and Wolman, 1992; Borraz et al., 1994; Elcock, 1995). Yet a persistent finding of research is that elected mayors do not increase voters' interest (Copus, 2006). Turnouts in American local elections where elected mayors existed have been as poor or lower than those in Britain.

Meanwhile, although a further working party report published in July 1993 did not directly advocate elected mayors it did make further proposals for the creation of core executives in local government. In general, it recommended the creation of a formal distinction between executive councillors responsible for policy-making and other councillors who would be community representatives, concentrating on scrutinising the executive. By the end of the 1990s such a distinction was informally accepted by many councillors (Elcock, 1998). This working party proposed four innovations: first, the establishment of a single party executive committee, exempt from the requirement imposed after the Widdicombe Report (1986) to appoint members to all decision-making committees in proportion to their parties' strengths on the full council; secondly, lead members to be chosen to whom the council would delegate executive powers; thirdly, a cabinet system to be created, with delegated powers to its members; and, lastly, a distinct political executive, possibly elected separately, opening the door to the prospect of a directly elected mayor in control of policy, with the council becoming largely a scrutinising and review body (DoE, 1993; Leach and Wilson, 2000).

Following the election of May 1997, further debate on the future prospects for elected executive mayors was subsumed within the discourse of New Labour 'modernisation' as a whole. The mayoral agenda connected strongly to several areas of modernisation: public participation, effective leadership, 'performance' and a modernist notion of rational progressive change. Mayors were of

the time. They were, after all, *new*. Legislation to create an elected Mayor for London, together with a Greater London Assembly was passed after a referendum in May 1998. Thus the UK's first elected mayor was established. Then the publication of White Papers on local government leadership (DETR, 1998, 1999) generated the Local Government Act 2000 which offered local authorities and their communities three options for reforming local political management structures. These were an elected mayor with a cabinet; an elected mayor with a city manager, or a leader and cabinet system (smaller authorities with populations of less than 75,000 were permitted if they wished to retain the traditional committee system). The Government emphasised the value of such executive systems in improving the management and co-ordination of the council's services, providing a clear point of contact for the numerous organisations now involved in the wider governance of fragmented local government systems and increasing public interest and involvement in local political life.

The first elected executive mayors took office in 2002, but only in a very small number of local councils: eleven in total (excluding the London mayor) at the outset. Where mayors came into being, it tended to be in response to a crisis in the affairs of the council, such as the imprisonment of its leading members for corruption (Doncaster), pressure from prominent local citizens for the creation of a mayor together with an especially high-profile contender (Middlesbrough - see Fenwick, Grieves and McMillan, 2004) or general disillusionment with the performance of long-standing party systems (North Tyneside; Mansfield). Voting ‘yes’ in the initial referendums provided what was essentially a political opportunity for local people in very specific places, motivated by very specific reasons which had little to do with the great vision of local leadership offered by either Left or Right. The novel use of the supplementary vote system provided an additional opportunity for a few local parties to sense the prospect of power by a faster route than the long haul of increasing council seats a third at a time. Significantly, none of the initial crop of elected mayors was to be found in the big cities where both Left and Right had focussed their attentions and where the dramatic changes to city government were envisaged as taking place. Only one council, Stoke on Trent, opted for the mayor and council manager option (a fascinating sharing of executive authority between officer and elected leader) but Stoke subsequently reverted to the leader and cabinet model. The mayor and manager option was removed altogether from the statute book by the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. There is no evidence from either the referendums or the subsequent elections that public interest has been increased by the opportunity to vote for elected mayors.

On the Right, Heseltine remained a confirmed enthusiast for elected mayors. He chaired a Conservative Party working party on local government which produced an important “Open Source” report (Conservative Party, 2009), including a recommendation that the largest English provincial cities should be required to hold referendums on whether to adopt elected mayors. This was itself a compromise given a persistent argument within such circles that elected mayors should be introduced to all English councils. After the Conservatives took office in coalition with the Liberal Democrats in May 2010, this plan was put into operation and, under the Localism Act 2011, referendums were duly held in ten cities in May 2012.

What Goes On? The Faltering Expansion of the Mayoral Experiment 2011-12

"The whole point is to give people a say. No-one is forcing mayors on anyone." Grant Shapps, Conservative Minister, 2012

The referendums held in 2012 were, in Prime Minister David Cameron's words, "...not some trivial re-structure or fiddling about" – perish the thought that this could ever be the case in local government - but were a much more significant opportunity to "see your city grow more prominent, more powerful, more prosperous" (BBC News on-line 23 April 2012). An affirmative vote would be followed by mayoral elections in these cities later in 2012. Mayors would then enjoy the prospect of sitting in a twice-yearly mayoral Cabinet, chaired by Cameron, to share experience and lobby government directly on the needs of their cities.

This vision did not come to pass. Turnout figures of around 24% in Manchester, Nottingham and Bristol, rising to 35% in Bradford, suggested, as in earlier mayoral referendums, that the public is at best lukewarm in expressing a view about this opportunity (Table 1). Of those citizens who did vote, in nine of the ten cities there was a clear decision not to introduce the mayoral system. Only in Bristol was there a 'yes' vote. Arguably, this was accounted for in part by specific local factors, as in earlier affirmative referendums elsewhere. Bristol City Council had experienced a relatively unstable leadership and a number of changes of leader in the previous decade, with a level of political uncertainty characterised by *The Economist* as "...coups, ambushes, partial elections and backroom deals bringing down minority administrations and wobbly, ad-hoc coalitions." ('Bagehot', 2012). The case for a Bristol mayor has been advanced by, for instance, Sweeting (2012).

Table 1: Mayoral Referendums 2012

City	Yes %	No %	Turnout
Birmingham	42.2	57.8	208,696
Bradford	44.9	55.1	120,232
Bristol	53.3	46.7	76,912
Coventry	36.4	63.6	62,102
Leeds	36.7	63.3	170,350
Manchester	46.8	53.2	91,270
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	38.1	61.9	64,719
Nottingham	42.5	57.5	49,263
Sheffield	35	65	127,461
Wakefield	37.8	62.2	72,967

Under the 2007 Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act, it became possible to introduce the elected mayor system through resolution of the council: public consultation in some form is still needed, but there is no longer a requirement for a referendum. Leicester took this route in 2010. Liverpool followed the same procedure in 2012 and elected its first mayor in May of that year. Nonetheless, even now, only 16 local councils in England (excluding the London mayor) have mayoral systems (Table 2). In only 14 of these was the mayoral system introduced as a result of a popular vote.

Yet there exist some indications that in the few places where mayors exist, there is no strong appetite to abolish the office and replace it with the council leader system commonplace elsewhere. In Doncaster, the referendum in May 2012 on whether to abolish the office of elected mayor, currently occupied by a member of the English Democrats who are politically unrepresented anywhere else, indicated that voters wished to retain the mayoral system by 62% to 38%. This could be seen as positive evidence that elected mayors may gain acceptance where they have had the chance to establish themselves and demonstrate their value, an argument plausibly at the disposal of those who favour expansion of the mayoral experiment. Yet it could also be evidence of the very same indifference that elsewhere leads local electors to decline mayoral systems in the first place: there tends to be a vote for staying with what exists already and no great desire to change it unless there have been significant localised issues or scandals.

Interestingly enough, the English Democrats also presented the petition in Salford which prompted its own 2012 referendum on whether to establish the office of mayor. The local Labour Party was against. When the first mayoral election in Salford was held, Labour won with 51% of the votes (on the second round) while the English Democrats obtained 3.6%. .

Further referendums may well take place in future, whether to establish mayoral systems or to abolish them. The Labour Party locally, along with other political groups, is seeking a referendum on abolition of the mayoral system in Hartlepool. The Independent incumbent (first elected in 2002 after a policy seemingly based on not campaigning in any conventional sense) was re-elected in 2005 and 2009 and achieved a strong showing in the World Mayors awards.

Experience in Liverpool and Leicester suggests that choosing a mayor without referendum could become a significant political route in ensuring its advance, given the manifest reluctance of local electors to introduce the mayoral system through any kind of popular vote. Introducing mayors universally by decision of central government would be an even more decisive way of concluding the matter, and has, it seems, been considered by government. However it would be politically difficult to advance the mayoral agenda - predicated partly on public engagement - in quite this prescriptive way.

Table 2: Elected Mayors in England (at August 2012)

Local Council	Mayor	Party	Last Election
Bedford (Unitary)	Dave Hodgson	Liberal Democrat	2011
Bristol (Unitary)	-	-	Initial election due November 2012
Doncaster (Metropolitan Borough)	Peter Davies	English Democrats	2009
Hackney (London Borough)	Jules Pipe	Labour	2010
Hartlepool (Unitary)	Stuart Drummond	Independent	2009
Leicester (Unitary)	Sir Peter Soulsby	Labour	2011
Lewisham (London Borough)	Sir Steve Bullock	Labour	2010
Liverpool (Metropolitan Borough)	Joe Anderson	Labour	2012
Mansfield (District)	Tony Egginton	Independent	2011
Middlesbrough (Unitary)	Ray Mallon	Independent	2011
Newham (London Borough)	Sir Robin Wales	Labour	2010
North Tyneside (Metropolitan Borough)	Linda Arkley	Conservative	2009
Salford (Metropolitan Borough)	Ian Stewart	Labour	2012
Torbay (Unitary)	Gordon Oliver	Conservative	2011
Tower Hamlets (London Borough)	Lutfur Rahman	Independent	2010
Watford (District)	Dorothy Thornhill	Liberal Democrat	2010

Notes on Table 2:

Stoke on Trent initially opted for an Elected Mayor (with Council Manager) system following a referendum in 2002. This was replaced by the Council Leader and Cabinet model following a further referendum in 2008.

Table 2 does not include the London Mayor. Created under the Greater London Authority Act 1999, it is a different post with different powers.

Bristol will hold its first mayoral election in November 2012 following its referendum in May 2012.

The Warwick Commission (2012) has considered the role of elected mayors in providing strategic leadership to cities. The Commission pointed to the inadequacies of a mayoral position that is limited to city council boundaries that do not correspond to areas with which the public identify, advocating instead a "Metro mayor" jurisdiction over a wide "functioning economic area" (2012: 9). This argument is interesting in two respects. First, it resembles the view taken by some early political advocates of the mayoral system who envisaged a leadership role for mayors in the wider urban conurbation (eg, Todd, 2000) – what would become seen as the city region – rather than the existing municipality. This aspect of the mayoral debate is one that is likely to re-emerge in future, given the overall lack of success of the policy drive toward city mayors. Secondly, the emphasis upon Metro mayors (or indeed upon city mayors around existing municipal boundaries) is interesting in the context of the places where mayors actually exist (see Table 2). Until recently there were no elected mayors in any major cities at all, the public having opted for the system in relatively small and diverse local government areas.

In policy terms, the uncertain advance of the elected mayor in 2012 has had some interesting subsidiary effects. The 'City Deals' agreed with eight cities in July 2012 (two months after the mayoral referendums) provide additional delegated powers, some transfer of budgets from central government, and greater powers to borrow. In return, the cities are now required to provide stronger governance, whether through instituting a directly elected mayor or, if not, through greater formal collaboration with other local councils. Two of the eight – Liverpool and Bristol - had already opted for mayors before the agreement on City Deals. All eight cities concerned were amongst the ten who held referendums in May 2012, apart from Liverpool which had already taken the decision without referendum.

After more than a decade, in some important respects the mayoral system remains curiously unproven, for instance in the acrimonious dispute between the Conservative mayor of North Tyneside and its majority Labour council over respective powers to determine the annual budget, something that is not self-evidently clear from either statute or practice. There is still little sign of overall public enthusiasm for this faltering experiment in local leadership. Copus has noted that the elected mayor "failed to capture widespread public enthusiasm and interest" (2006: 42). Consistent with some initial expectations, or some initial fears, it has provided opportunities for independent candidates or those in minor parties to succeed (including Doncaster, Middlesbrough, Mansfield, Tower Hamlets and Hartlepool) but this co-exists rather uncomfortably with a highly persistent party-based local political culture that, going with the flow, tends toward or against elected mayors according to local political circumstance.

What Sort of Leader, What Sort of Leadership?

I know no personal cause to spurn at him
But for the general: he would be crown'd
How that might change his nature: that's the question.
(*Julius Caesar,* 2:1:11-13).

Having outlined the context in which elected mayors found their way into English local government and having reviewed current developments and recent referendums, we now turn to the substantive question of what mayors are actually doing when in office. Are they leading locally? If so, what does it mean to speak of leadership in relation to elected mayors? To address these questions we turn to our own research, drawing from interviews conducted with elected mayors and applying the analytical matrix of leadership (Figure 1) we have previously proposed and applied in relation to

local decision-making (Elcock and Fenwick, 2012). This can be used to explore the experiences of elected mayors in communities ranging from a major city to a relatively small former mining community. The matrix contains nine cells, covering the governing, governance and allegiance roles of elected mayors and the formal, informal and personal attributes they possess and make use of in carrying out their roles.

Governing

The formal context of the elected mayor is set by the Local Government Act of 2000, which defines their powers and functions. This formal setting is in marked contrast with the earlier generation of relatively strong individual local authority leaders or "city bosses", whose dominance of their councils depended largely on their personal attributes and local circumstances, together with party rules that permitted party leaders to control their councils, including recruitment to them, although their offices as leaders were not then given any form of statutory recognition (Jones and Norton, 1978; Elcock, 1981, 2012). For today's elected mayors, however, the formal definitions and restriction of their powers, coupled with the development of the Overview and Scrutiny role for councillors who are not members of mayoral cabinets (and do not have executive authority) should provide protection from the misuses of powers with which some former "city bosses" were charged. Our respondents were generally supportive of the Overview and Scrutiny function as a means of holding them publicly to account for their actions and sought to ensure that it worked effectively in their authorities. One respondent declared that "good scrutiny is good governance" but like several other mayors, he wanted his Scrutiny Committees to be more proactive, not just reacting to his actions and policies. Thus another respondent declared that "I'm trying to get Scrutiny to understand policy development. I ask for a view about what we should do". The formal accountability mechanism of Overview and Scrutiny maybe was strengthened by mayoral encouragement to play the role proactively. A third mayor identified effective leadership of Scrutiny Committees as being critical: his scrutiny function was performing better under a new chairman. There was a general feeling that the Overview and Scrutiny role needed to be developed further by their councils.

In terms of their governmental functions, elected mayors commonly claimed the benefits of quicker decision-making. One declared that "local decision-making is now much quicker – we took away the old slow local government". A further perceived gain is better co-ordination of policies and service provision, although some mayors saw securing co-ordination as a continuing problem: "Co-ordination is better but it's still pretty poor. There is too much of a departmental culture... (they) are not truly joined up. I have to bang on the table all the time!" Other mayors were more positive, however: one declared that "I engage across relationships (departments) rather than working in silos – work across the officers – counteract the silo mentality". Another felt that the mayoral role had secured "better officer co-ordination – encourages officers to think outside the box." A third declared that "everyone works well together here – there's no problem with co-ordination". Mayors certainly recognised the besetting local government problem of cross-departmental co-ordination and were addressing it with varying degrees of success.

Many mayors have determined their own policy priorities and initiated specific schemes. One mayor was concentrating on four policy areas: environment, regeneration, business and transport. Several mayors were engaged in personal projects, such as cleaning up their communities: one had developed "Operation Clean Streets" which entailed "concentrating on a different area each month. It makes an impact" to remove litter, graffiti and fly-tipping, while generally cleaning up the area. Others focussed on reducing crime and anti-social behaviour by appointing Community Safety Wardens to work closely with the police in local communities. Another initiative was the development of innovative new activities for young people. One interviewee demanded to know why no Community Service Orders were being made in his town and developed a close relationship with the Probation Service. Mayor Robin Wales's young people's musical initiative in Newham, an

attempt to imitate the highly successful Venezuelan *El sistema* programme, is particularly interesting. (We identify him here as he was not one of our respondents). One mayor had developed his policies by publishing a series of mayoral Green and White Papers outlining his proposed policy initiatives and seeking views on them from councillors, the public and outside groups: a White Paper means that the public can hold the Mayor and the Council to account. Another mayor had published a list of 100 pledges during his election campaign and claimed that 99 of them were met within his first 100 days as Mayor: "I need to demonstrate that I do an effective job – this must be demonstrated and documented". A third mayor was implementing ambitious redevelopment plans for the town centre.

The governmental role for executive mayors comprises the use of formal powers, internal relationships (particularly with senior officers) and the discharge of mayoral responsibilities. Governing involves not only formal powers however, it also includes informal relationships with senior actors within the local authority and it depends in no small part on the character and background of the mayor as an individual (see Figure 1). Even in formal terms, the governmental role of the mayor is not as settled as it might seem. As noted above, continuing dispute surrounds the respective powers of mayor and councillors in North Tyneside in relation to budget setting. Similarly, recent conflict between the elected mayor and councillors in Doncaster over local library provision and setting the annual budget had to be resolved at the level of judicial review. There is the prospect of a mayoral 'abolition' referendum in Hartlepool in 2012, partly arising from the mayor's decision earlier in the year to dismiss the six Labour party members of his Cabinet. The six had approved the budget in Cabinet but then failed to attend full Council to confirm it. The mayor commented in the press that "they were all excellent councillors. It's not personal and it's not an anti-Labour thing" (Westcott, 2012). Elsewhere, one of our early interviewees, then in his first term, commented that he was going to identify all the powers that he could formally call upon, and was going to use them. Indeed there is continuing policy debate about investing all mayors with extra powers. This is likely to be an element of the mayoral agenda in the future, with central government seeking to make mayors a more attractive option by giving them more influence.

Governance

The mayors' extensive governance roles reflect the fragmentation and reconstruction of the local state, which mean that most local government policies require the involvement and collaboration of a wide range of other public authorities, as well as the local business community and voluntary sector, a process formalised for instance in the collaboration required as part of the 'City Deal' discussed above. In pulling together a wider pattern of partners in governance, mayors claimed real benefits in terms of securing coherent community action because they are clearly identifiable contact points for outside agencies. All the respondents spend much time and energy on maintaining and improving their contacts with numerous outside groups and organisations, notably the local business community and trades unions but also many other groups, including ethnic minorities, churches (one said that "the Bishop dropped in yesterday") and environmental lobbies. Particular importance was attached to business contacts; one Labour mayor stressed his close personal relationships with the Chief Executive Officer of his local Chamber of Commerce: "we work together and politics are not there. He was very supportive of the concept of an elected mayor – more supportive than his colleagues". Another respondent has a monthly breakfast with his local Chamber. One mayor in a multi-racial city attached importance to encouraging the teaching of English as a second language: the large Asian community "identify what we need to do". Another mayor stressed the importance of the two Polish clubs in his town, an area of significant Polish settlement after the Second World War. Mayors also played active roles in their areas' Local Strategic Partnerships and more recently the new Local Enterprise Partnerships established by the Coalition Government, although none of our respondents had taken the chair of these bodies. The distinctive role of mayors in a partnership environment characterised by meta-bureaucracy rather

than co-governance (Fenwick, Johnston-Miller and McTavish, 2012) may indeed become important in defining the leadership role of that mayor in such meta-bureaucracy (see also Sims, 2012). One mayor within the present study was his LSP's Vice-Chairman and other mayors stressed the importance of these bodies. As indicated in Figure 1, the mayors' role in wider patterns of local governance is partly a matter of formal partnerships but it is also a function of how individual and informal networks are employed.

Allegiance

The term allegiance in this context covers institutional and formal aspects of the mayor's position (such as the prospect of referendums on abolishing the position), informal relationships (not least the relationship with the public) and individual characteristics (including integrity and personality) (see Elcock and Fenwick 2007; 2012). Crucially the variable of power runs through these elements of allegiance (Figure 1).

The allegiance role has also produced significant innovations and changes in established local authority practice. Our respondents commonly stressed the importance of maintaining personal relations with the public, including dealing with individual requests and grievances: "I have to work on the micro level...because of telephone calls from members of the public...The people put us there and we must deliver what they want". Some stressed their personal recognition, like the respondent who declared that "I cannot get 100 yards down the street without being stopped – this may be nice or not". They also stressed their need to campaign for re-election from the beginning of their terms of office. Several stressed the usefulness of neighbourhood forums and parish councils as vehicles for maintaining public contact: one respondent declared that "the Neighbourhood Forums help – there is a lot of interest". Many respondents stressed the importance of getting themselves and their cabinet members out into the local communities. "Cabinet members also go out and about in the community" and cabinet meetings were being held in different parts of the borough. They also attend meetings discussing local issues such as planning disputes, traveller sites or highway potholes. Most mayors also attached great importance to using the local media. Several mayors write weekly columns in their local newspapers or appear frequently in them; one claimed to be in his local newspaper two or three times a day. Elected mayors have tended to have higher local and regional media profiles than their council leader counterparts in adjoining areas. Local broadcasters are important too, although one mayor reported having had persistent difficulties with his local BBC station.

In carrying out these roles, mayors may be assisted or hindered by other factors. Relations with their councils and the party groups within them vary. The relationship may be one of co-operation, especially where the mayor and majority group are of the same party: one had a council where 52 of its 54 members were members of his party and he leads the majority Group himself. However, he denied that partisan politics was central to his role: "I came up with and am loyal to my Party but I have never been tribal...Politics is not the most important part of this job". This sense of needing to be at least somewhat detached from partisanship was widely shared. Other mayors had more difficulty with majority council Groups drawn from their own party, however. One declared "having the same party in control is not necessarily easier. Labour members still have not comprehended their loss of executive control". Others, especially Independent mayors or those faced with opposing majorities on their councils, had difficult, even confrontational relations with their councils, including having their budgets defeated by combinations of opposing parties. One Independent has had his budget rejected more than once. A Conservative Mayor faced with a Labour council majority had "managed to avoid gridlock" but had "imposed" decisions on them "when necessary". Such conflicts were more likely where councillors had yet to recognise that their role had permanently changed following the election of an executive mayor.

Relationships with the Chief Executive and other senior officers also vary widely, ranging from close collaboration to outright dismissal (See Fenwick and Elcock, 2005). One called on his Chief Executive every Friday afternoon to wish him a nice weekend and was lucky to escape after one and a half hours. By contrast, several respondents had dismissed their Chief Executives or made them redundant. One mayor had made the Chief Executive redundant and had promoted the Chief Operating Officer to be Head of the Paid Service; he had also got rid of several other senior officers and reduced the size of the management team from seven to four. Another mayor had fired two Chief Executives and had redesignated the post as Managing Director with specific responsibility for service delivery. Hence, "we have stripped out the policy side of the CEO's work: strategic policies are made by the Mayor". His view was that "the Mayor has to prevail over the Chief Executive – politicians must win every time". He went on to say that "a lot of CEOs like to play the mayoral game as head of the organisation". Significantly perhaps, his successor, drawn from a different political party, also had difficulties with his Chief Executive, claiming to have had four in three years but is now working well with his current Chief Executive. At least one mayor has defined the mayoral role as essentially including that of the CEO.

The evidence of these interviews indicates that elected mayors are generally positive about their various roles and are keen to leave their impression on their councils and communities. They have demanded substantial changes in established practices but some have faced resistance from councillors and officers who have difficulty in accepting the changes in their roles imposed by the mayoral system. Governance roles are of great importance to our respondents. There have been no signs so far of problems of corruption or misuse of powers amongst the small crop of English mayors, despite Shakespeare's warning quoted at the beginning of this section.

Conclusions

Mayors are still a policy innovation in England. They are new, and some of the difficulties of implementation can be ascribed to their novelty. Internationally, however, mayors are far from new. Historical lessons exist, and some of these lessons have a reach of more than a century. For instance, in the United States, the mayor-council model and the council manager model are overwhelmingly the most common, but not the only, options for local administration. The Commission model still exists. In Portland, Oregon, the city has uniquely retained the 'Commission' form of local government. It adopted this system in 1913 after abandoning the mayoral form of government which existed from 1902 to 1913 (Morgan, Nishishiba and Vizzani 2010).

Moving forward a hundred years, the UK coalition government that took office in 2010 has continued with the expansion of the mayoral experiment, although (as under the previous government) this has had decidedly mixed results. If not a policy failure, it does represent something of a policy non-event which (as under the previous government) raises the question of why the mayoral agenda continues to be advanced by central government at all. It is clear from the level of participation in, and the results of, mayoral referendums and elections that public excitement is not overwhelming.

Our interviews do reveal an individual leadership role of the mayor (Fenwick, Elcock and McMillan, 2006). Individual leadership is to be understood in a number of senses. First, it is distinct from party-based leadership, and it is evident that even where mayors belong to the majority party (or for that matter a minority party) they tend to see themselves as separate from some of the old ways of party discipline, possessed of a direct public mandate, and able to assert a certain independence. Secondly, it constitutes individual leadership in that it can, at best, serve to pull

together a number of local partners and interests, going beyond the boundaries of the council itself, as depicted in Figure 1. Thirdly, it is individual leadership insofar as it directly involves individual power as vested in the figure of mayor. Power is a significant common variable in the 'analytical grid' presented at Figure 1. It is also of interest to note the distinction that has been made between the 'power' and the 'powers' of the mayor. "The wider the powers, the greater the power" (Warwick Commission, 2012: 8).

The persistence of the mayoral experiment resides in a consistent interest, across the main UK-wide parties, to 'do something' about the perceived inadequacies of leadership at local level. During the Conservative years, the attempt to do-something tended to run into the *cul-de-sac* of structural re-organisation, as though revising local government structures would in itself generate different ways of working or eliminate annoying obstructions. During the New Labour years, the emphasis upon public engagement, as a key theme of local modernisation, manifested itself in new internal structures for local authorities – of which the elected mayor was a prominent option – and later by further organisational change, particularly in yet another attempt to address the relative strengths and weaknesses of two-tier and 'unitary' councils. All this remains unfinished business, and within this the faltering progress of the directly elected executive mayor continues. As it is now easier to create the post of elected mayor, with no requirement for a referendum, some further modest expansion of the mayoral model may well be envisaged according, as always, to local party political factors. The key choices facing central government in any acceleration of this unsteady growth of the executive mayor are likely to be, first, what kinds of extra powers are to be granted to elected mayors to make the job appear meaningful to local voters (or potential incumbents) and, secondly, what exactly should be the relationship of mayors to the place they represent and lead. On this latter point, there is a striking difference between 'places' and the artificial administrative areas that tend to characterise English local government (Table 2). This is a big and difficult issue for government given the competing interests involved.

The meaning of place and locality remains uncertain in local public policy in England and it is a key challenge. There is an avowed emphasis in policy and legislation on localism, but there is tension between this push toward the most local level (sub local authority) and the wider economic area or urban region (extra local authority). Exactly where mayors can plausibly fit within the debates about meaningful local 'belonging communities' or regional economic units is unresolved, but any serious expansion of the mayoral agenda requires a resolution of this difficult question of place.

Mayors are both political and managerial leaders. There is no doubt that this model of individual leadership was intended to break the accepted patterns of party dominance and dysfunctional decision-making at local level. The problem in adopting the mayoral mode from overseas however is partly one of prevailing political culture. In an English context, powerful individual leaders do not have a ready cultural acceptance. Although earlier episodes involving strong local leaders and 'City Bosses' exist, as discussed in the opening sections of the present paper, they have tended not to end happily. There are Independents amongst the current fifteen (soon to be sixteen) mayors but they have to work with local party machines and with sitting councillors who may be political opponents. The result may be compromise and gridlock, rather than decisive local leadership. There are political, cultural and structural reasons for the uncertain advance of the elected mayor as local leader yet there remains a central government emphasis, across the parties, on its expansion. These tensions have not been addressed during the past decade. There appears to be no immediate prospect of resolving the strange case of the English mayor.

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Methodology and Sources

This paper draws from the authors' research into local political leadership over the past decade. Between 2002 and 2005, a three-part study provided original data on changes in local political management, including the innovation of directly elected mayors. The initial study comprised a postal survey of councillors in four local authorities, follow-up interviews with a subsample of councillors, and interviews with four of the initial group of eleven directly elected mayors in England. Subsequently, two further mayors were interviewed. Additionally, one of the authors had conducted interviews with a sample of mayors in the USA and Germany and this was used to provide a comparison with early experience of this system in England. In 2012 three final interviews were conducted with serving mayors not previously included.

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Appendix

Figure 1: Analytical Grid for Elected Mayors

Influences:	**Institutional/Formal** (Manifest/structure) Legislation, standing orders, Council constitution	**Informal** (Latent/agents) Relations with council, parties, CEO, officers	**Individual** (Charisma/agent) Experience, background
Leadership Roles: **A: Governmental** **B: Governance** **C: Allegiance**	Policy, budget, vetoes, appointments, personnel Representation, outside memberships, decentralised structures Term of office, formal relation to council, power of recall/dismissal, abolition of office	Relations with parties, backbenchers, CEO, chief officers Relations with lobbies, interests, other levels of government Relations with outside parties, lobbies, electorate; power	Articulate, ability to dominate, negotiate; competencies/experience Reticulist abilities/skills, established contacts/networks Approachable, accessible? Risk of corruption, 'clientelism'; power

Source: Elcock and Fenwick (2012)