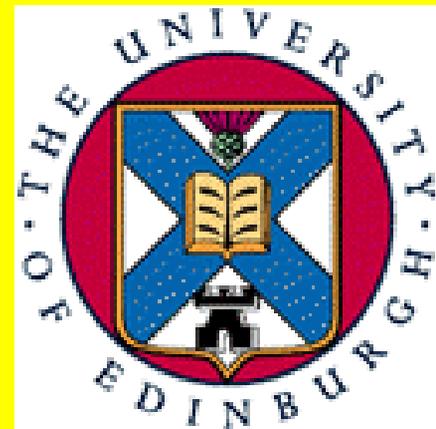




Has Devolution Delivered?

*The strange death of local
government....*

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My intentions ...

- To try and answer the question posed in this seminar series;
- To *support* the proposition of my own title *and - I hope- to prove it;*
- To challenge some myths & misconceptions of the devolution process & local government;
- To suggest some possible courses of action to stimulate local government
- *And.....*
'... it's my job to provoke you .that's what academics are for..' [David M amet -O leana]

Should we even ask yet...?

Read David Hume:

‘To balance a large state or society..is a work of so great difficulty that no human genius however comprehensive...is able to effect this...the judgements of many are necessary....[and] time must correct the mistakes which they *inevitably* fall into in their first trials and experiments...’

[The Founding Fathers did]

For local govt there are 4 key aspects to the question

- Devolution as a process
- The Parliament
- The Executive [*The Scottish Ministers*]
- The Executive [*The Scottish Administration*]
- All of these elements are related in multiple ways to local government
- ...*any alteration to, or re-stabilising of some of these relationships is a classic ‘wicked’ problem*

Devolution and local government - a symbiotic relationship?

- 'Devolution is a challenge for local government around the UK' Jeffery
- *Each* of the White Papers/ Acts has referred to building relationships with local government in different ways; working with & through local government
- Proposed English Regional Assemblies, a pre-condition - concurrent removal of one tier ...and local authorities are fundamental to the promotion of RA's

Devolution – a challenge for central *and* local government....

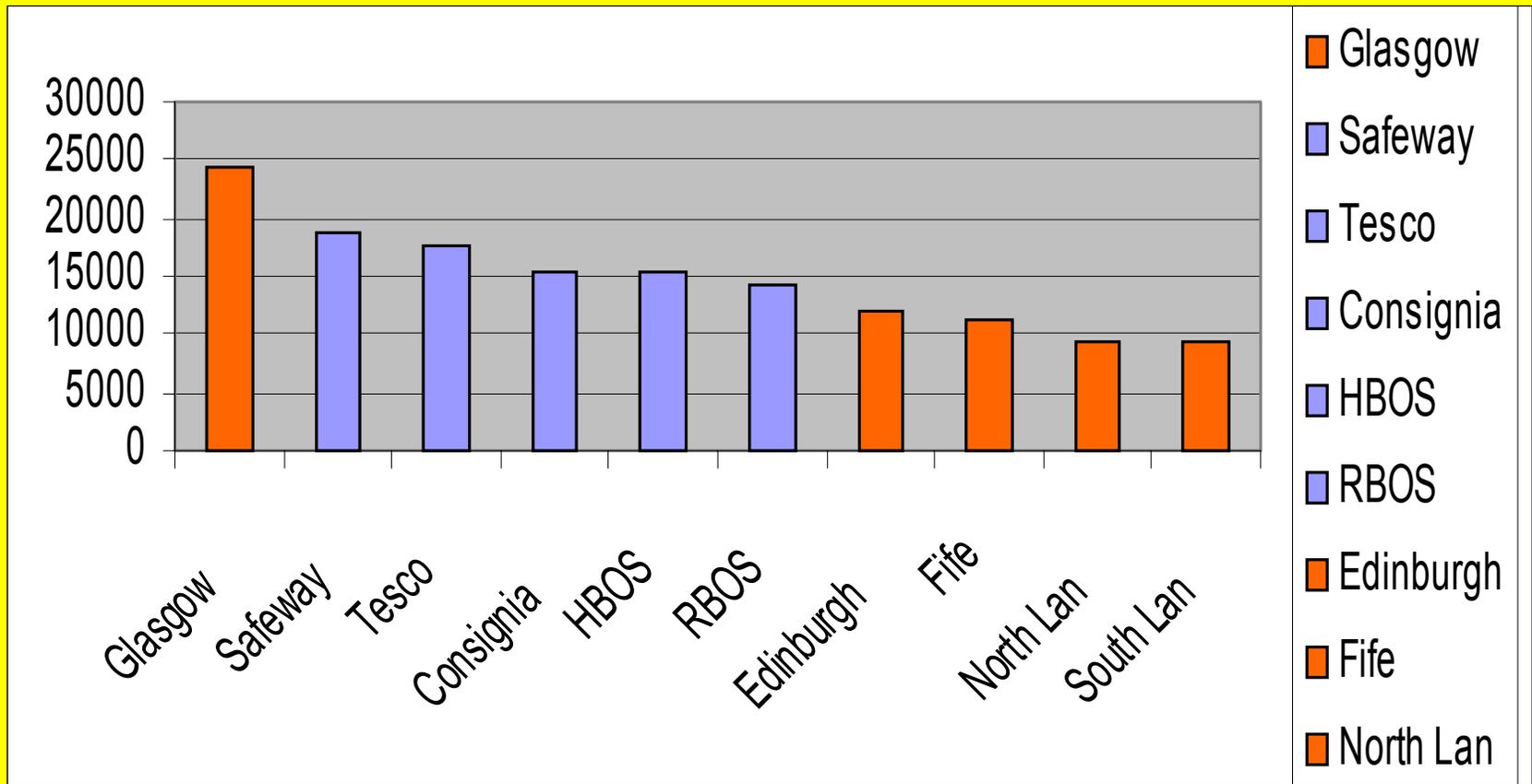
‘Mr Prescott was not in control of events. The problem with this dispute is that no one has been entirely in control. As such, the chaotic pay negotiations are emblematic of Britain's blurred lines of power.....In the longer term there are questions about the relations between central and local government, a dry issue that nonetheless is a recurring theme in most such dramas that have unfolded in recent years, from the management of the floods to the chaos caused by the mad cow disease. In most developed countries there is more local autonomy than in Britain,

Steve Richards Ind on Sun 24.11.02

Is local government important?

- ‘Why do I keep going on about school boards and city councils?
‘Because that is where all the governing is done - that’s what counts for people’

Scale of local government in Scotland



Employees

One hundred years ago.....

[A man will.....]“..walk along the municipal pavement, lit by municipal gas, swept by municipal brooms with municipal water, and seeing by the municipal clock in the municipal marketplace that he is too early to meet his children from the municipal school, hard by the county lunatic asylum and municipal hospital, will ...tell them not to walk through the municipal park but come by municipal tram..to the municipal library, gallery and museum..’

Sydney Webb [1896]

However change is continuous..even in our pavements



Even though used to supply electricity

And there *was* an 'Edinburgh' Water Works



Most recently 'care' home inspection departed local government
...but new developments in waste 're-cycling' are appearing

Golden age - when?

- Chamberlain and 'sagacious audacity' [Hattersley]: 100 years ago ?
- Glasgow City Chambers: 100 years ago ?
- Waterloo Bridge : 60/70 yrs?

**•Long term -discretion
reduced**



Today -Local govt...irredeemably dull and banal ?

‘I am the wrong person for this job, I feel I should be working for the council..’ *Kathy Burke* - Oscar winning actress

[Mrs Shepherd, Secty of State] ..Looking like the second-in-charge municipal librarian. *Hugo Young*

‘The Austrian Chancellor...has qualities no more than would be expected of a competent county council chairman’ *British Ambassador*

However -local government *does things*

- ‘What the council does matters far more to my constituents than who forms the national government’

Simon Hughes MP. F.T.
27.4.1997 P10

Resolutions in the Town Hall aren't as important as getting the bins emptied.'

Margaret Hodge, M.P
Daily Telegraph 2/07/02

But it is often condemned as doing them *badly*

‘Public sector management, especially in local government, is often bad.’

[Economist]

‘Local authority bureaucracy is not best suited to deliver dynamism..’ [Digby Jones]

Any commentary on the recent fire-fighters negotiations *

Views in Scotland on local government...

- ‘My local council provides high quality services’ : 43 to 32
- ‘My local council does the best it can with the money available’: 42 to 33 [*Scottish Household Survey*]

But maybe the 'public' have inconsistent views..

- Satisfaction with local government is high; indeed people are more than twice as likely [52%] to be satisfied with their local council as they are with parliament. *Mori 1997*
- However.....91% of respondents agree with the statement: 'Generally councils needs to get better at running services..' *Mori 1998*

So the devolution process is easily damned by 'Municipalism'

Mcwhirter:

'You couldn't help thinking that is it all, well, a little bit municipal'*

On renaming the Scottish Executive.....[as]

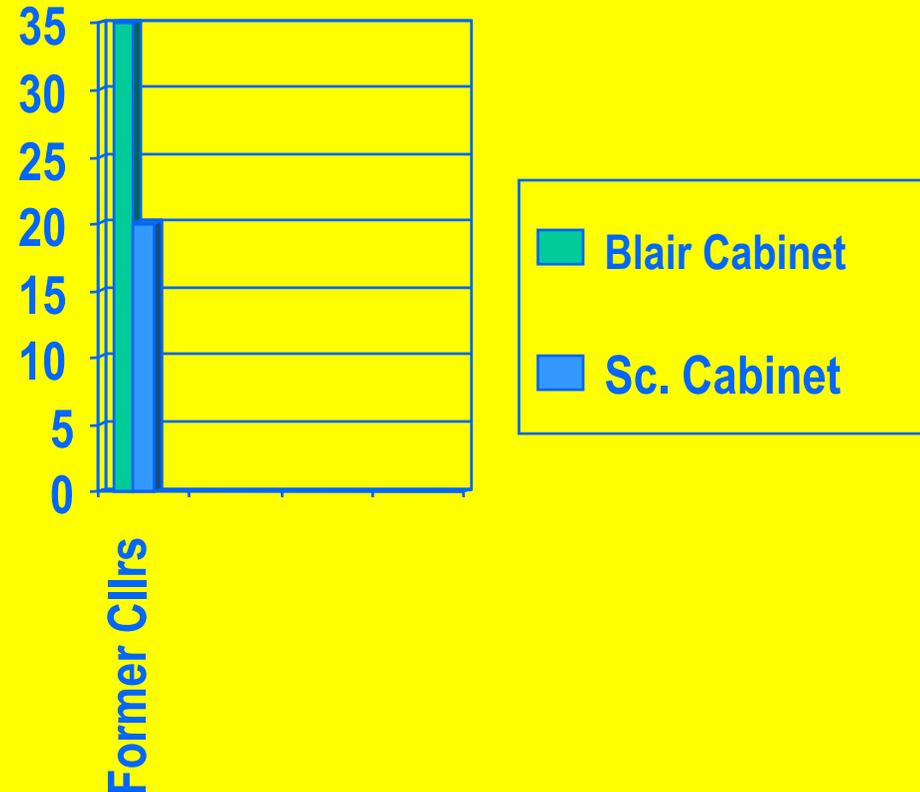
'Strathclyde Large; greater Lanarkshire; or
Bigcoouncil.com'

Andrew Neil:

'Not one member of the Scottish Parliament would get more than £18000 pa in the private sector...they were all jumped up councillors'

Yet where is the taint of ‘municipalism’?

- < Fewer MSPs are *former* councillors than :
- amongst Scottish MP's
- amongst Members of the WA



Who got the right message on all that local government experience?

‘...remember, also, that [the] Parliament is criticised for being full of local government functionaries.....whose experience is viewed as a disadvantage.

Less obviously, one of the institutions advantages has been turned against it.

Alistair McKay 11.01

Blairite ministers, often with a local government background themselves, have proved to be eager centralisers in their determination to get results.

Peter Riddell 09.02

Wrong! Wrong! Wrong!

How does the 'old lags' view express itself?

- Ministerial actions
- The attitude of former [councillors] as Ministers to their ex-colleagues
- 'Baseline study of public perceptions of Local govt.' [1995]



In Scotland as in Westminster..

- At Ministerial level there is tacit scepticism of the capacity of local government to 'deliver'
- *Bennett et al* report on mutual suspicion/hostility across the local government official <> civil service divide

Local govnt + Devolved institutions

Councillors' views

- Local govt shares same objectives as Executive:
No : 58%
Yes: 29%
 - Local govt shares same objectives as *Parliament*:
No: 50%
Yes:33%
- [Lab cllrs: 44/38]

The paradox of [ALL] government

‘...a government ill executed,
whatever it may be in theory ,
must be, in practice, a bad
government’

Alexander Hamilton[?]

The symptoms/causes of *[terminal?]* decline

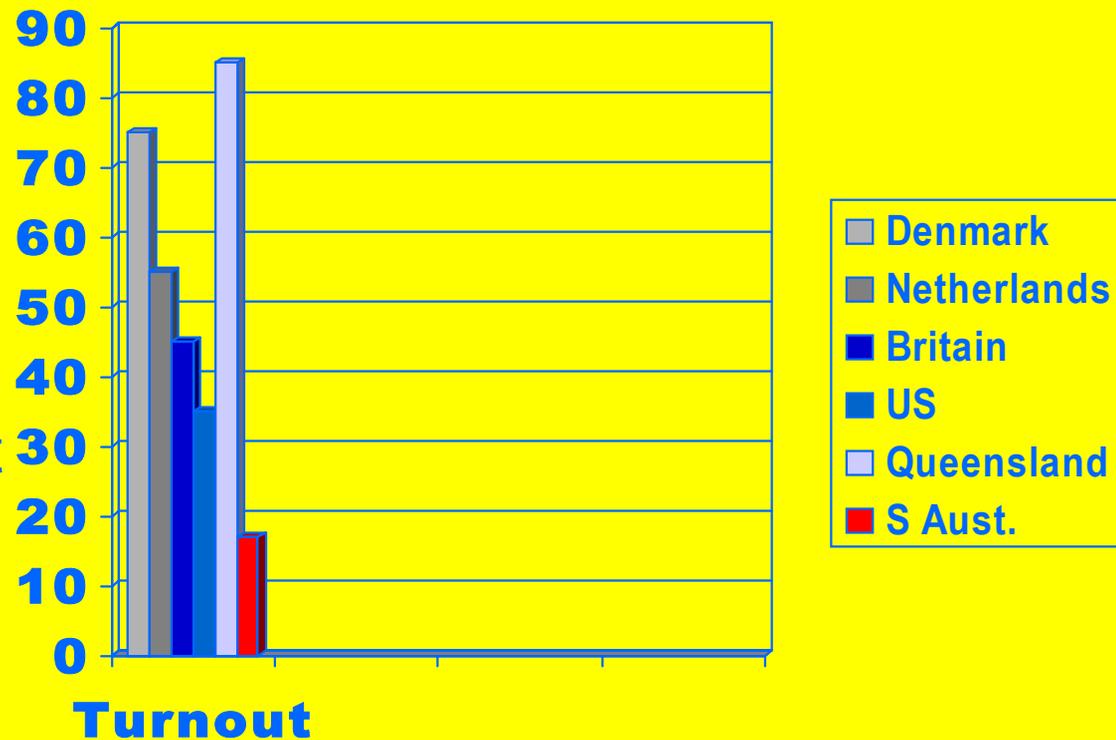
- Our declining enthusiasm for voting & collective behavior
- Our public aspirations vs our private wishes
- Increasing homogenization of society
 - Government *good* intentions

Do they have a similar impact??

- Government *ill* intentions

Voting less: than our neighbours, than our elders..

- 21 country study shows 81-77 overall decline over the period since 1945
- 'The disappearing American voter' discusses the 'cohort effect' - also seen in UK
- But only 10% of pop. say voting is **not** important [*SHS*]



Collective endeavour in an individualised society?

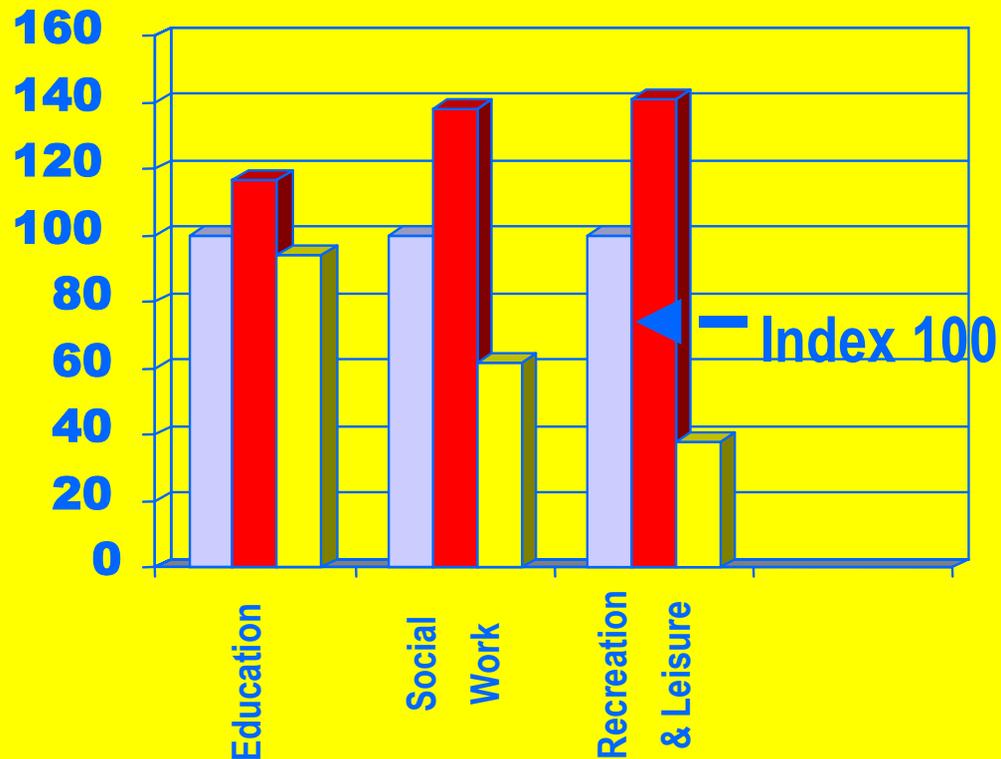
- ‘the object of government is to do collectively for people what they cannot do or cannot do well for themselves in their separate capacities..’ [*Lincoln*]...
- But *many* can do more and more for themselves
- cf with decline in trade union penetration; increase in individual litigation
- ‘Involved in the local community?’
- 17% adults DUNDEE <> 58% SHETLAND [*SHS*]

Public aspirations <> private endeavours

- Typically, we want better public services but to pay less in tax; *there is limited evidence that this is changing*
- A decline in civic behaviour [the Edinburgh parking furore]
- Much of strong public reaction appears to be expressed as 'Me & mine' [the Edinburgh flooding dilemma]
- K. Grant in 'Scotsman' of Monday?

Increasing 'horizontal' homogenisation of service activity

- 1995 53% thought services 'here' same/ or no different from elsewhere [*Baseline study*];
- An increased emphasis on national standards
- Increased complaints about 'post code ' every kind of service
- An increased 'nationalisation' of expectations



Government 'Good' intentions

Universal pre-school provision ; when does it become compulsory?

Free Care for the elderly – a passport benefit; is there any need for a local government intermediary?

Cheap public transport for older people - why not an elderly card at 60/65 [or Blunkett style ID cards?]

Government 'ill' intentions

- Performance Indicators as league tables - they are treated as such by some media - and this trend may accelerate
- Targets.....may lead to sanctions
- The dissolution of a DLO [North Lanarkshire]...may be a prelude to the 'centrifugation' of, say, an Education/Social work/Cleansing department that is 'failing'.

A comparison of progress

England



Scotland



Contrasting past-contrasting futures.

- Services *and* jobs - 80's
- Services *or* jobs? *Many council leaders in the 90's*
- Services *or* government?
Not many people -yet?

Some modest proposals

*• Proportion representation for local governmentI
have nothing to add*

- If housing is exiting from councils – what of education?
- Affirmative local voting on capital proposals; bond issue & council tax supplement to cover interest.
- Repatriate business rates to the jurisdiction.
- Remove all planning and other ‘appeal’ channels.
- Remove all ‘second guessing’ powers on – e.g. - school closure, traffic crossings, flood prevention, and countless other matters!

Are we all ready to pay the [policy & financial] price of multi tier government

Steve Richards again:

‘Mr Prescott was not in control of events. The problem with this dispute is that no one has been entirely in control. As such, the chaotic pay negotiations are emblematic of Britain's blurred lines of power

.....In the longer term there are questions about the relations between central and local government, a dry issue that nonetheless is a recurring theme in most such dramas that have unfolded in recent years, from the management of the floods to the chaos caused by the mad cow disease. In most developed countries there is more local autonomy than in Britain.....

.....allowing for more regional variations in pay settlements in public services and more clear-cut lines of responsibility in terms of who runs what. ‘

***I somehow think we are
not ready.....***

**‘Take what you want - but
pay the price’**

A Spanish Proverb



Thank you!

- And from January 27th contact me - if you wish - @ 



Queen Margaret University College

EDINBURGH