



*Putting the Frontline First Task Force*

Chair: Sir Richard Leese  
Leader of Manchester City Council

Chair: Sir Steve Bullock  
Mayor of Lewisham Council

01 March 2010

Dear John

**Putting the Frontline First: Meeting the Local Government Challenge**

In late December of last year, you asked us to lead a Task Force to develop proposals to identify how councils can be made more efficient and save money without negatively affecting the quality of frontline services.

In undertaking our review, we have sought to look at the existing best practice in local government to establish what solutions work in making a real difference to council budgets starting from the position of identifying what it is our residents want and need and how, even with more constrained finance, we can improve outcomes.

We are pleased to enclose our report, *Putting the Frontline First: Meeting the Local Government Challenge*. In producing this report, we are grateful for the support we received in compiling the wide range of evidence from across local government and, in particular, from the sector improvement bodies. We are also grateful to the members of the Task Force who helped bring a wealth of expertise to the table.

This is very much a two-stage report, with the first part setting out strategic questions which council leaders need to be asking themselves about their council. Council leaders should use this to challenge their senior officers to ensure that the necessary action is being taken. The second part of the report sets out 10 strategic questions to help council managers to consider the actions, tools and resources needed to meet these challenges.

That is the challenge which we have set for local government.

However, efficiency and innovation in local government can only go so far without the Government playing its role. The *Smarter Government White Paper* set out how the Government intends to recast the relationship between the centre and the frontline. Letting councils have more control over setting priorities, managing resources and reducing burdens on councils and the frontline will make a significant difference.

If local government is able to embrace the Total Place approach to service delivery, then Government will need to ensure that as many funding decisions as

possible are taken at a local level in an integrated way. Ring-fenced budgets and disparate funding streams can all create a disincentive to councils aligning budgets to meeting local priorities which can be best met through local decision making. This is a challenge to Government and Government will need to ensure that the performance reporting through indicators, inspection, and assessment, is only based on what is absolutely necessary to allow councils the space to concentrate on doing what is most important to us all, delivering services for our customers.

The best of local government is already delivering. Government now needs to fully play its part.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard Leese'.

**Sir Richard Leese**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Steve Bullock'.

**Sir Steve Bullock**