

Council	Agenda Item 52(b)
29 January 2009	Brighton & Hove City Council

NOTICE OF MOTION

CONSERVATIVE GROUP

DEMOCRATIC ACCOUNTABILITY AND THE QUANGO STATE

This Council believes that an over-reliance on unelected quangos and public bodies to deliver public services undermines the principle of democratic accountability that is fundamental to our society. The spending of taxpayers' money, without proper lines of accountability is bad for civic society, effective government and undermines public trust and confidence. This Council thinks that local councils, and the partnership structure they head, are better positioned to deliver public services because they command a clear democratic mandate from local residents, unlike quangos.

This Council notes with concern that there has been a considerable growth in an unelected, unaccountable 'quango state' over the last decade. Examples of the 'quango state' include:

- Since 1997, the cost of quangos has increased in real terms by over 50%
- In 2006/07, taxpayers funded 1,162 public bodies, none of which was run by someone with a direct public mandate.
- These unaccountable public bodies cost the British taxpayer nearly £64 billion every year.
- An example of expensive quangos that lack a democratic mandate are Regional Development Agencies (RDA), which spent £2.6 billion of public money in 2006/7.
- The RDA responsible for spending money on the behalf of residents of Brighton & Hove is the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA), which spends nearly £200 million annually.
- RDA board members are not elected by the people who they are supposed to work for, and are only appointed or accountable to a Government Minister in Whitehall (in this case the Secretary of State for Business, Enterprise & Regulatory Reform).

This Council believes the 'quango state' requires fundamental reform and wherever possible and appropriate, powers, resources and responsibilities should be devolved to directly-elected local authorities.

Where this is not possible, quangos should be directly accountable to Parliament, rather than the Executive. Local outposts of national quangos should be held properly to account by local authority overview & scrutiny committees under powers contained in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and the new Local Democracy, Economic Development & Construction Bill. This Council believes that Brighton & Hove Overview & Scrutiny committees should make more use of these powers.

In 1995, Gordon Brown promised a “bonfire of the quangos” if the Labour Party got into power, however all that happened was unelected quangos grew more powerful and less accountable to local people whose taxes they spend.

Therefore this Council:

Requests that the Chief Executive writes to the Minister for the Cabinet Office calling for him to:

- a) Ensure that a far higher proportion of all significant quango board appointments are directly-elected local representatives or councillors.
- b) Ensure that board members have a duty to stand down when they no longer represent the sector from which they were appointed.
- c) For quangos that remain, introduce U.S.-style confirmation hearings for national and regional quango appointments (and their annual budgets) in front of a House of Commons Select Committee.

Proposed by: Cllr Lynda Hyde

Seconded by: Tony Janio

Supported by: Cllrs Mary Mears, Dawn Barnett, Ayas Fallon-Khan, Geoff Wells, Jan Young, Averil Older, David Smart, David Smith, Ann Norman, Dee Simson, Brian Oxley, Trevor Alford