

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

PUBLIC SECTOR REFORM AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

SUBMISSION FROM NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

The Scottish Parliament's Local Government and Regeneration Committee has launched a call for written evidence from all interested parties on a three-strand inquiry under the overarching theme of public sector reform and local government in Scotland.

Organisations and individuals are invited to submit written evidence to the Committee in relation to the overall remit, or to any or all of the individual strands.

Overall Remit

The points made in our original submission to the Christie Commission remain relevant to this consultation.

The opportunity for a fundamental review of what our public services are for and how they can best be configured is timely and opportune. However, it is vital that the review is fundamental and is not confined to consideration of structures and boundaries between the main public sector agencies. We believe that it is important that reform is connected with the key strategic issues which the public sector is addressing such as narrowing health inequalities and shifting the balance of resources to early intervention. We think it important that reform is shaped around key principles with outcomes remaining the focus and with robust evidence underpinning change.

All Public Sector Reform should be underpinned by the key principles of strong local democratic control; accountability of service providers to the local community; and a commitment to improved outcomes that demonstrate best value.

It is also vital that we preserve the "public service ethos" at a time of increasing focus on running public services on a more commercial basis. There is a risk of a "one size fits all" approach, which does not take into account individual and community needs.

We are supportive of a rolling reform approach taken forward in the context of an agreed national strategy for Scottish public services alongside locally led initiatives for service improvement.

Objectives for the three short inquiries

Strand 1 – Partnerships and outcomes

To examine the ongoing development of community planning partnerships and the community planning process and assess how these could be built upon to support outcome-based approaches to service planning and delivery in local areas.

Key questions for this strand of the inquiry:

1. How could councils better integrate their partners into the process? How could the degree of commitment to the process amongst other community planning partners be improved? How can any legislative or administrative barriers that make partnership working more difficult be overcome?

Community planning partners on all Community Planning Board & partnership groups must be given a clear remit of what is expected of them and that they have sufficient delegated authority within their own organisation to take decisions.

Whilst legislation to make all partners equally accountable for delivering on community planning and SOAs should not be ruled out, a voluntary, cooperative approach is the preferred option. This may provide a greater degree of speed. In any case, strong leadership, particularly at CPP board level is key.

2. How can local authorities and their partners move further towards real, integrated working?

Within North Ayrshire we have adopted a model whereby senior officers of the NHS, the Police and the Urban Regeneration Company are members of the Council's Strategic Management Team, which is chaired by the Chief Executive of the Council & comprises also the Chief Officers of the Council. The SMT meets on a six weekly basis to consider matters of a strategic nature, improvements to joint working & to monitor progress on delivery of the SOA. This is a model which has worked well in terms of moving further towards real integrated working and could perhaps be adopted elsewhere.

Also within North Ayrshire there is a Multi-Agency Problem Solving Group chaired by a senior officer of Strathclyde Police, who also chairs the safer North Ayrshire Strategic Partnership & sits on the SMT. The MAPSG has been very successful in tackling anti-social behaviour in specific geographical areas by tasking various agencies and involving local communities and local Elected Members. This is also a model which could be extended.

The Council has agreed to appoint a Partnership Analyst as a member of the Community Planning Team to drive forward our commitment to locality planning.

3. What steps would facilitate the sharing of budgets in pursuit of shared outcomes?

Scottish ministers are uniquely placed to give a strong lead on the facilitation of the sharing of budgets.

Targets and budgets are set independently for NHS, Local Authority and other CPP Partners. This is reflected in very separate and different governance arrangements which can act as a barrier to partnership working and to joint preventive initiatives.

It would be helpful to map collective resources available against their deployment within communities in most need. It would also be helpful to bring together finance officers from all partners to start the process and make recommendations to the CPP on more alignment and pooling of budgets during budget preparation, before annual budgets are set.

4. How can the partners further improve on the progress that has been made and overcome the remaining challenges on engaging communities and voluntary sector organisations in the process?

Existing engagement exercises with communities can be duplicated amongst partners and dilutes their meaning. CPPs should commit to co-ordinated engagement exercises and ensure that actions are taken across the partners in conjunction with communities.

5. How can the community planning arrangements be adapted and developed to promote outcomes-based and preventative approaches?

Short term funding is often allocated on the basis of demonstrating outcomes measured over very short timescales e.g. Change Fund. This inhibits a longer term, preventative approach. There can be a disconnect between high level strategic targets and shorter term measures e.g. HEAT targets on the whole are focused on treatment and care which do not lend them well to prioritising a preventative approach. These need to be joined up more effectively at a strategic level.

A longer term approach with outcomes and indicators which reflect this approach and that all appropriate partners are accountable to deliver on would be of assistance.

We would support the proposal that the duty of Best Value could be extended to cover all public services. An improved definition of best value - as a duty of continuous improvement measured in terms of outcomes for the areas and people receiving public services would also be welcomed. Such a change would require an updating of statutory guidance on best value and community planning.

Any further additional resources to support preventative work would also be of assistance, due to the time lag in preventative work, where the financial savings created in reducing reactive services tends to be long term.

There needs to be a cultural and political acceptance of the longer term nature of preventative spend before results are evident.

Partners require to show a maturity in accepting that changes within one partner's area of responsibility may result in a benefit accruing to another partner in terms of the services it is responsible for.

6. How is the work of delivery on SOA outcomes managed, coordinated and driven through the various community partnership structures and agreements? How could Single Outcome Agreements be improved to deliver on community planning targets?

Regular monitoring of progress by the various CPP structures is key as is corrective action being taken quickly where indicators show that outcomes are not being achieved.

SOAs need to focus on key outcomes and priorities for their particular local authority area on an evidence based approach.

7. What is the purpose of a Single Outcome Agreement in assisting the delivery of improved outcomes? How are local Single Outcome Agreements developed, and how do they relate to national priorities?

The purpose is to ensure that a collaborative approach is adopted by pooling resources to achieve outcomes for communities, as indicated above, based on evidence of need & priorities. There should be a "Golden Thread" linking national priorities, SOA priorities and individual partner delivery plans.

8. How could local authorities and other public bodies contribute more to influencing and improving outcomes in their area?

The North Ayrshire CPP agrees with the Chrisite Commission findings that there is a willingness among partners for barriers to be removed allowing all available resources to be brought to the table. It would also support the recommendation that there should be a review of current funding arrangements for public sector organisations to increase this flexibility.

9. How can arrangements, processes and accountability be improved?

Suggestions for improvements to arrangements, processes and accountability are contained within the responses to questions 1 to 8. Partners also need to challenge each other more in terms of their contributions to Community Planning and the SOA and to commit to ensuring SOA outcomes are included in their own individual plans.

Whilst all partners are accountable to their own organisations, the role of Elected Members on local authorities as representing their constituents through the democratic process and being accountable to them strengthens community focus, and should be given greater recognition by partners.

The role of Elected Members is currently being considered as part of Police and Fire and Rescue Reform and should perhaps be considered more widely in relation to other public bodies, particularly the NHS e.g. through a greater proportion of Elected Member representation on Health Boards.

Strand 2 – Benchmarking and performance measurement

To examine the development of work that has taken place over the last two years in relation to the development of benchmarking and comparative performance data and cost measurement and assess how it can contribute to the performance of local authorities in Scotland.

Key questions for this strand of the inquiry:

1. What are the main challenges (cultural, technical, geographical or other) in developing performance measurement and benchmarking systems for local authorities across Scotland?

Confusion over what is the purpose of benchmarking and an unwillingness to be honest and open with data and processes. In addition concerns on the perceived negative aspects of possible league tables may hinder implementing benchmarking systems. A lack of maturity on the part of the media contributes to this

2. To what extent has the work undertaken over the last two years by the Improvement Service, SOLACE and others contributed to developing a common approach to benchmarking across Scotland's local authorities?

There is now much more empathy with and willingness towards the need to undertake benchmarking activities as part of a range of robust service improvement tools. The use of a self assessment system such as EFQM and its other derivatives e.g. PSIF nationally which also supports the use of benchmarks and benchmarking, has also encouraged greater understanding and the requirements for a common approach.

3. What technical or other resources are needed to continue and complete the development of recent work on benchmarking?

There will be a requirement for the development of common competencies in the various processes that can be used when undertaking benchmarking exercises. This includes skills not only for professional officers undertaking the exercises but also Elected Members to support their role in policy development.

4. To what extent can the developing work on benchmarking be extended across community planning partnerships? How can data derived from benchmarking influence the future direction of community planning and the contents of future SOAs?

The use of benchmarks and benchmarking can be extended across all partnerships so as to ensure the results of any benchmarking can improve performance not only locally but also on a national basis.

5. How can the development of benchmarking help improve the performance of local authorities in Scotland?

Benchmarking can assist in not only developing service improvements across all local authorities through the sharing of best practice but also the sharing of methodologies used in making efficiencies and reducing costs. In addition the sharing of agreed comparative data will assist in critically reviewing service delivery processes and identify where good business models are in place.

6. Should the Scottish Government have a role in providing national impetus to the development of benchmarking and performance measurement?

Yes as this would ensure that common approaches and methodologies are being used across all sectors of government allowing benchmarking to take place not only between local authorities but also between other government agencies.

The reform of external audit and inspection and the development of a single external scrutiny body for all public services would be the single most significant step that could be taken to drive forward improvements in performance management and benchmarking across public services.

Strand 3 – Developing new ways of delivering services

To examine progress in relation to the development of shared services and other innovative ways of achieving economies of scale and harnessing the strengths and skills of key public sector partners to deliver the best possible quality services in local areas.

Key questions for this strand of the inquiry:

1. How can cultural and organisational change be promoted to ensure that local authorities and community planning partners are able to work together to develop the kind of integrated services that are aspired to by local communities?

Cultural and organisational change amongst partners serving the same local communities will only succeed where partner organisations agree to integrate their organisations based on local community need, ideally through a one-door approach.

Partner organisations need to approach change with an open mind and not be protective of their own organisations and organisational interest at Board, Council and Management levels within their organisations. Legislative change can provide the impetus and focus for change.

2. How can the tensions between shared services creating savings through potential reductions in the number of staff involved and the economic impact brought about by any resulting job losses be resolved?

A fundamental objective of shared services is to focus service provision on local communities in the most efficient way possible. Savings will, by default, accrue through job reduction. In the event there is scope to re-invest savings in the provision of new services not presently available, the economic impact can be balanced. Should there be no scope to re-invest savings, there will be a negative impact on the local economy.

3. How can any legislative or institutional barriers to developing shared and innovative service delivery models to their full potential be overcome?

Some perceived Legislative barriers may be overcome by clearer definition or interpretation of the existing law. Where barriers remain, amendment to relevant legislation would have to be considered.

Institutional barriers could be addressed by behavioural change within partners. This would require champions with a 'can do' attitude within each partner organisation engaging with their organisation in support of a culture of shared and innovative service delivery models.

4. Is there scope for further national shared services along the lines of the shared recruitment portal for local authorities, 'myjobscotland'?

Shared services are best taken forward at a local level, accountable to local committees.

5. What can be learned from elsewhere, for example from initiatives such as the Nottingham Early Intervention City or the Birmingham total place pilot?

The lessons from Nottingham on the challenges of developing early intervention, pooling funding and integrating services targeted on families are very useful. In North Ayrshire there is a significant commitment to developing early intervention and prevention activity. Effective interventions from other areas have been reviewed and proposals are being developed to implement them. These include expanding parenting programmes, creating a multi-agency domestic abuse team, developing family centres around community nurseries, and providing more family support. The Birmingham total place pilot also provides useful learning about the joint resourcing of services in local areas. The Council has been involved in an Integrated Resource Framework pilot with NHS Ayrshire and Arran which builds on this initiative.

6. How can innovative delivery methods for services and collaborative arrangements (as mentioned, for example, in the Christie Commission report) help to improve outcomes and tackle embedded social problems focused in defined geographical areas?

North Ayrshire has recently conducted an Additional Support Needs (ASN) Transport Service pilot. The project examined how the demand for the service could be altered (instead of merely cutting it) through engagement with its stakeholders. Opportunities to improve the service were identified as well as outcomes around social inclusion and life-skills training for children with ASN.

There were also longer term benefits of early intervention and managing parents' expectations.

7. What scope is there for developing ways of delivering services, such as the personalisation of care, in order to mitigate the effects of shrinking resources while also promoting improved standards of care?

A complete review across the Council was undertaken at the start of the Change Programme looking at cross-council and service-level opportunities. The overall expected benefit from the Change Programme is that Council services will have undergone genuine transformational change, driven by the needs of a changing population and a significant reduction in funding. This has involved developing new skill sets, changing the mindset and culture of the Council, applying a level of challenge to senior managers about current thinking, and using best practice from elsewhere. This has assisted the budget setting and service planning process when Services were asked to prepare proposals to reduce their revenue costs by 20% over the 3-year period to 31 March 2014.

**North Ayrshire Council
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