



Briefing 07/32      May 2007

# Transforming public services – A progress report

TO: ALL CHIEF EXECUTIVES, MAIN CONTACTS AND EMAIL CONTACTS (Scotland)

CC: ALL CHIEF EXECUTIVES, MAIN CONTACTS (England, Wales & Northern Ireland)

## **Key issues**

The Scottish Executive have published a progress report on their Transforming Public Services consultation

The report highlights the views and opinions of those who work for and use public services, and sets out proposals which have been put forward to help achieve 'world class public services'

## **1. Introduction**

In June 2006, the Scottish Executive published "Transforming Public Services – the next phase of reform" (see APSE briefing 06/47). Envisaged as a think piece to stimulate the ideas and options which surround public sector wide reform in Scotland, this consultation document contained a number of significant outline thoughts with regard to the potential shape of Scotland's future public sector, and the roles played

by its many partners. It initiated a wide-ranging dialogue with those who work for and use public services. APSE responded on 29 September 2006.

On 30 March 2007, the Scottish Executive published a progress report, which “sets out what we have learnt from the dialogue; and how change is being taken forward across public services, informed by that dialogue.”

This briefing paper explores the views and opinions gathered from the Executive’s dialogue with service users, public service leaders, front line workers and the third sector, and considers some of the proposals that have been put forward.

## **2. The Dialogue**

During the consultation period for *Transforming Public Services*, the Executive also undertook a consultation on Shared Services and a scoping study on ICT in public services. In addition, the Executive supported a number of events across Scotland to gauge the views and opinions of a range of stakeholders, including APSE, on the principals of reform. In summary, the dialogue found that:

**There has been almost universal support for the key principals of reform. That is, that Public services need to:**

- be user focused and personalised to ensure that services are organised around the needs and aspirations of service users and citizens, not the convenience of the service provider;
- drive up quality and encourage innovation - setting high standards, tackling poor performance, promoting innovation and creativity, and building in continuous improvement;

**To achieve these outcomes, there is need to:**

- improve efficiency and productivity - reducing unnecessary bureaucracy, embedding a culture of efficiency across public services, and strengthening leadership;
- join up services and minimise separation - joining up services across organisational boundaries, and sharing best practice;
- strengthen accountability - moving power and resources to the frontline, strengthening local responsibility and accountability and efficient and effective governance.

**Public service users want:**

- To be treated as a person
- To know how and where to complain about problems in public services
- To be involved in designing and deciding about the services in their area
- To hold public services to account on the things that matter to them
- To be told when important changes are made to public services
- To have access to skilled front-line workers

**Public service leaders want:**

- A strong reform framework which supports bottom-up change with:
  - leadership from the Scottish Executive;
  - clearly stated direction and timescales;
  - strong communication to the public and workforce;
  - clarity about the scope for local variation.
- Fewer shared priorities with a focus on outcomes
- Clear national, regional and local decision making
- Stronger accountability to the public
- To build on what we have already achieved
- To develop a culture of innovation
- To strengthen performance management within public service organisations
- To build a skilled, flexible public service workforce

**Front-line workers want:**

- To be consulted and involved
- To be valued and empowered
- Systems and processes to support joined-up public services
- Stronger support for multi-disciplinary working
- Sustainable funding for new initiatives

**The third sector want:**

- To be engaged in the strategic design of services
- To do more than service delivery
- A level playing field - between voluntarily and statutorily delivered services
- The commissioning of services to be improved
- Better support for the spread of innovation and new ways of working
- To develop infrastructure support for the sector – especially for small community and user groups

**3. Building a platform for change**

According to the Executive, the dialogue demonstrated a widespread consensus on the need for significant and sustainable reform across our public services.

There was a general view that some structural change may be necessary, but the consensus was that structures should not be the main focus of the reform agenda. A one-off redrawing of the landscape would be expensive; could lead to a reduction in levels of performance for several years while the changes bedded in; and may not prove to be sustainable, as new ways of delivering services continue to emerge. At the same time, there was a significant minority view that the current structure of public services is getting in the way of transforming quality, efficiency and joined up working.

The progress report sets out some of the proposals which have been put forward, and explains how the Executive believe these will help achieve world class public services.

## **User focus and personalisation**

The public currently access public services through many different access points - schools, GP surgeries, police stations, council offices, business gateways, etc. Often, members of the public have to find their own way round the different organisations, and have to provide the same basic data to a number of separate public bodies. With the redefining of business processes and the development of new technology to enable reform, services can be designed around users.

### **Example – one stop advice and support for the public**

“We are supporting the roll-out across Scotland of the innovative Citizens Advice Direct telephone advice service, sponsored by Citizens Advice Scotland, which has recently been successfully piloted in Glasgow in partnership with Glasgow City Council. This groundbreaking partnership between third and public sector partners has the potential to act as a client-focused portal for a number of expert advice and information services, providing the public with a single telephone number that delivers a simple and accessible way in to the many expert helpline services currently existing. It also has the potential to provide an efficient and cost-effective ‘rapid response’ service for statutory bodies requiring temporary helpline services to be swiftly activated to provide advice and information in the face of sudden public emergencies”.

## **Quality and Innovation**

World class services require more than tackling poor performance. The report emphasises the need to drive up standards across the board, free up space for new ideas and ensure that the benefits from new ways of working are spread as widely as possible.

### ***Example - cultural entitlements***

Cultural entitlements will empower local councils to develop their major role providing culture to citizens - and the citizens themselves will be asked what activities and participation opportunities they want to see provided. Our approach will promote good quality provision, focused on continuous improvement. We are match-funding 13 pathfinder projects in which councils across Scotland are working innovatively with partners to develop entitlements that match the aspirations of some of the hardest to reach groups, including vulnerable older people and minority communities. For example, Fife Council is piloting targeted consultation at 'grass roots' level to explore how entitlements can overcome barriers to participation. South Ayrshire is using artistic residencies with young families in rural and regeneration areas, to increase their engagement with culture.

### ***Efficiency and productivity***

The Efficient Government programme delivered £442m of recurring efficiency gains in 2005-6 against a first year target of £405m, and the Executive have identified £1,271m of planned savings by 2007-8, against their overall ambition of £1.5bn. However, it is believed more must be done in the coming years to ensure efficiency is fundamental to everything the public sector does.

#### **Example – shared support services**

Stirling, Clackmannanshire, Falkirk, East Dunbartonshire and Perth & Kinross Councils have developed a business case for a multi agency shared services capacity for their HR, payroll, finance and procurement functions. The business case has just been completed and is currently being evaluated. The Councils have looked at a number of different strategic delivery options with their preferred option being the creation of a council owned shared service solution. They anticipate that such a model could deliver significant efficiency savings over the next 10 years.

### **Joining up**

The dialogue identified a wide consensus that services need to join up better than they do at present and that Community Planning was a good basis for doing so.

#### ***Example – joining up Glasgow***

The Glasgow 'Pathfinder' is a joint initiative by Glasgow City Council, NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde, Scottish Enterprise Glasgow, Strathclyde Police, Glasgow Housing Association and Jobcentre Plus. Through the Pathfinder the partners are integrating their service delivery for the city's key priorities of health improvement, economic growth and employment, and community safety, in a way which reflects local and city-wide Community Planning. The partners are also looking at new funding arrangements which would improve these key outcomes for the city.

### **Strengthening accountability**

The Executive advocate that they are already working to deliver stronger accountability to citizens, communities and elected politicians through accessible, consistent and streamlined information across public services, focusing on outcomes, responsiveness and customer satisfaction and service quality and through greater participation by communities in the designing and planning of services.

### ***Example – accountability to service users***

Under the Renfrewshire Alternative Procurement Project the Public Social Partnership is working to develop and deliver a befriending service to elderly people in Renfrewshire. The Partnership embraces Renfrewshire Council Economic Development and Social Work departments, Renfrewshire Council for the Voluntary Sector, the Volunteer Centre, the SCVO EQUAL social economy initiative, the Volunteer Centre and Contact the Elderly. Its objective is to involve service users and potential providers in the design, planning, piloting, and eventual procurement of the service and in capacity building with potential third sector providers. When the service is put out to tender, it will include a social benefit clause that will guide the local authority to take social benefit into account in its purchasing decision.

## **4. Conclusion**

The Executive’s dialogue has demonstrated substantial support for a collaborative and bottom-up approach to reform, which would harness the energy and ideas of all those involved in delivering public services. At the same time, there was a strong message that the Scottish Executive should:

- communicate a compelling vision, and a clearly set out framework for reform
- drive the agenda without micro-managing at a local level,
- lead by example, and
- create the conditions that will allow better joined up working.

As stated in our initial consultation response, APSE supports the aims of reforming public services in Scotland to make them more efficient, responsive and user friendly. However, we noted at the time that there was a lack of explicit intention of direction. This progress report explains that Executive have since used dialogue with people who use and work in public service to create clarity over the challenges they face and to generate ideas. Hopefully this will lead to a clearly set out framework for reform.

The progress report concludes by saying:

“We do not underestimate the scale of the challenge that lies before us. But nor should we underestimate the commitment of those involved in public services to find new ways to deliver the sustainable world class services that the people of Scotland deserve. We look forward to moving forward together”.

In closing, APSE would welcome the opportunity to be further involved in dialogue with regard to the reform agenda as the next stages of the process are rolled out.

**Gillian Simpson**  
**Research & Advisory Officer**