



Briefing 09 -14

# Public services on your side

This briefing is provided to APSE members throughout England and to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland for information.

HM government have developed a policy statement paper on the future of public services entitled '*Public services on your side*' which sets out the Government's approach to future reform of public services.

## **Key Issues:**

This briefing explores the interface with local government in:-

- Health and social care
- Children
- Welfare and skills
- Policing and social justice
- Empowering local communities
- Strategic government

## **1. Introduction**

The recession has focused interest back onto public service spending and service delivery, particularly with on-going commitments to further service personalisation and choice and the need to deliver efficiencies.

'Public services on your side' sets out a range of proposals for the development of the public service transformation agenda against a recessionary background. A number of these areas have a direct or indirect impact on local government, police and fire and rescue services.

## **2. Public services in the context of the economic downturn.**

The report sets out the reform of public services including the revision of opening hours to GP surgeries, development of new NHS hospital trusts, school academies and new children's centres. The report also interestingly references public sector spending with the voluntary and community sector, citing that this has doubled, from £5.5 billion to £11 billion. A move

that has been reflected in some of the commissioning strategies between local authorities and the health sector.

In the context of the economy the report references that Government has brought forward £3 billion in public sector capital spending to act as an economic stimulus, as well as an immediate boost to resources in Jobcentre Plus and other supporting fields.

Government's new investment in the public sector is projected to rise from £30 billion in 2007/08 to £40 billion in 2009/20. APSE briefing [08/56](#) further refers you to figures and analysis on the impact of the economic downturn on local government.

Whilst the report acknowledges the value of the public sector in the economy it also recognises that the financial services sector (banking) will remain a critical element in economic recovery and highlights estimates that look to the creation of 400,000 new jobs in the environmental sector.

### **3. Principles of reform**

The report references three principles of reform that were originally set out in the paper *'Excellence and fairness: achieving world class public services'* produced by the cabinet office. The principles are

#### **I. Citizen empowerment:**

To deliver information, entitlement and control to citizens – demanding not just the distribution of resources but control, at a local level, over the services received. Under this strand the report heavily references personalised services - to include one to one services, access at times that are accessible to all, to include for example, working parents and greater control and choice through personal budgets and an 'information revolution' – to allow those using public services to access data about service performance

#### **II. A new professionalism**

Under this strand it is intended to put at the forefront of public services the 'professionalism and trust in the relationships between public service workers and the people who receive services' such as the relationship between a GP and patients, teachers and pupils. The report references the Darzi review of NHS services as a model for other public services including professionals at the 'heart of policy making'. The report also recognises the need to 'boost skills' and attract talent especially in the current economic climate.

### III. **Strategic leadership**

This strand of the report references the need for a strong and responsive state that is capable of being flexible. But that the state must withdraw where it is unnecessary. The reports views the future government role to be one of

- Setting standards and entitlements
- Driving productivity
- Driving innovations

## **4. Health and social care**

The report references a new performance framework in the NHS which will allow consistent poor performing providers to be targeted and labeled as 'challenging'. This seems an inherently weak response to what is in effect contract failure on the part of some providers.

There is further support for 'empowering people with more control' and a move towards better screening for incidents of diabetes and heart disease with follow up life style interventions. Clearly the preventative role in public health through local authority services such as leisure, and use of public open spaces and parks, is one that APSE has supported, calling for greater recognition of the role of local councils in delivering on ill-health prevention measures.

In the case of social care, budgets will rise from £85 million in 2008/09 to £195million in 2009/2010, to support greater use of personalised budgets. Whilst local authorities generally support the need to make care choices closer to the end users concerns have arisen from the original pilots. A report, commissioned by the department of health in the 13 pilot areas entitled '*Evaluation of the Individual Budgets Pilot Programme: Final Report*' carried out by the social policy research unit of the University of York, found that whilst the distinctive approach in the Individual Budget pilots was to have been the pooling together of an individual's entitlements to social care support (with 5 other potential funding streams, including Independent Living Fund, Supporting People funding and Integrated Community Equipment Services) in practice the only funding stream that pilots were generally able to combine with social care money was Supporting People (housing support) money.

This was in part due to different Government funders, having different eligibility criteria and different administration processes. Clearly any expansion of individual budgets would need to take into account the need for funding streams to be capable of more integrated access.

Whilst the report found some positive outcomes from individual budgets with specific benefits for younger disabled people and some mental health service user's outcomes were less certain for older people and in the worse cases psychological well-being was actually damaged. Older people told researchers that they did not want the 'additional burden' of planning and managing their own support. It therefore essential that local authorities retain the flexibility, and the capacity, to provide care directly where that is the preferred choice of older people and other service users.

## **5. Education (Excellence for all our children)**

The report recognises the growth in professional people applying to take up teaching posts or teaching qualifications, particularly in the fields of mathematics and science as a result of the economic downturn. The report references the delivery of 133 new academies and 130 trust schools with academies set to rise by at least 80 in 2009 and up to 100 more in 2010.

For local authority service providers whilst the more strategic indicators, for example all pupils attaining set levels of GCSEs in core subjects, may appear remote from direct service delivery there are a range of opportunities for involvement in the reform of education that are often missed. One such area is the development of academies. For instance it is perfectly lawful for academies and trusts to utilise local authority providers in the school meals service and other facilities management services such as cleaning, caretaking and grounds maintenance services. Some partnership boards have regrettably taken decisions to, in effect, exclude council teams from the process. This creates difficulties not only for schools that miss out on good service continuity, but also financially for councils who may end up facing redundancy liabilities for staff no longer engaged within the new Education offering. The involvement of council services such as school meals provision within academies can help to build a more holistic approach to the development of healthy schools initiatives and create positive links to ill- health preventions targets and the promotion of physical activity. It is disappointing that the report fails to recognise these very links.

There is to be continuing development of breakfast clubs, sports and arts activities offering a range of out of school hour's activities, in particular in response to working parents. A

significant majority of councils have already signed up to deliver free swim programmes and a range of activities to promote physical activity amongst young people. It is important to link initiatives, wherever possible, into the schools programmes. Again as with council service involvement in academies, trusts and BSF schools there are no barriers to involving council's services in after school provision. Many would be able to utilise charging powers available within the Local Government Act 2003 or indeed rely upon the power of community well being brought into place by the Local Government Act 2000.

## **6. Active welfare and high skills**

The report recognises the need for a highly skilled workforce to shape the future recovery of the economy and in doing so it also explores the links to welfare provision. There is also a statement that the Governments' plans to eradicate child poverty by 2020 are to be enshrined in law. Extra funding for training places to encourage employers to take on unemployed people as well as additional funding for Jobcentre Plus and 'Train to Gain' are included as tools to help people move from benefits into work and to find new work, after becoming unemployed, as a result of the economic downturn.

Apprenticeships for 16-18 years olds as guaranteed places are pledged by 2013. Of an additional 35,000 new apprenticeship places 20,000 of these places will be public sector, the majority offered in front line public services.

Many councils have already contributed to apprenticeships. Glasgow council has its own training school and North Yorkshire County have a ground breaking apprenticeship training scheme. South Somerset district has also set up a new joint unit to help local businesses and prospective employees through the recession, linking businesses, the council and job seekers.

From April 2009 a new National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) will provide a single point of contact from any individual or employer or wants to take up or offer an apprenticeship.

## **7. Policing and justice**

3,600 neighbourhood policing teams are now operational across the country with an increasing emphasis in the report to crime prevention measures such as young people's workshops on the dangers of violent crime and use of high visibility jackets on community

'pay back schemes ' to act as a further deterrent and visual message of justice being seen to be done.

The report also highlights the intention to extend the use of crime maps and to make these tools accessible to local people so that they can look at local crime patterns, determine local priorities and provide greater local accountability within policing teams.

The report strongly emphasis joint working between the police and local authorities, for example in areas such as the staysafe schemes which provide the ability to take young people off the streets at night, to be taken to a place of safety and parents informed of their actions. There are also links with youth justice teams.

APSE has recently launched a new advisory group 'Local authorities, police and fire and rescue services partnership group' which looks at sharing best practice in joint working. APSE is disappointed that the report only references limited joint working on crime initiatives with children's services. Many of the community based services that can help to make a place feel safe include front line council services, such as environmental services that make areas feel safer and cleaner and work with fire authorities, helping to reduce the risk of arson, for example by interventions in vehicle removals and in areas like street lighting helping to design out crime hotspots.

The report recognises that further joint working is essential for example in areas such as housing where unsafe doors or windows can create the climate for acquisitive crime. Whilst the report references some areas of best practice further work should be in place, at a local authority level, especially given the joint inspection framework brought into play with CAA which couples together local authorities and police authorities including crime reduction and use of resources.

## **8. Empowering local communities**

It is envisaged that 70,000 new homes will be built for affordable housing purposes by 2010/11 though doubts on realisation of this figure are cast due to the current economic climate. Work is set to continue on pooling resources. A new framework for regeneration is planned for summer 2009 to look at ensuring physical, social and economic regeneration occur in tandem.

In addition to Local Area Agreements the report references further development of Multi Area Agreements to tackle worklessness housing and transport, in accumulation to the ten agreements already signed off.

As referenced earlier Government spending in the third sector has doubled since 1997 and is set to rise further. And following the outline in '*Communities in Control; Real People Real Power*' the report explains the continuation of devolution from government to local government and direct to citizens. Examples of empowerment are cited as

- Transfer of assets' to community groups
- New bus regulation powers contained with the Transport Act 2000
- Participatory budgeting schemes
- Provision of fire and rescue and service efficiencies within council tax bills
- Publication of local performance results through the new CAA
- Social tenants in control through choice based lettings
- Young people in control through the Youth Capital Fund and Youth Opportunity Funds and Myplace scheme that will provide £190 million in grants over three years

The report also references the development of social enterprise to be set up by public service professionals 'where they are able to bid to deliver more innovative public services'. The report fails to justify why a social enterprise model would be capable of more innovative service delivery. New powers provided to councils are, by the Audit Commissions own findings, under-used. Powers such as trading and charging for services and the wider usage of the power of community well being would both seem appropriate routes to service delivery improvements without the need to resort to company based models that ultimately remove the governance of services from locally elected members.

## **9.Strategic government**

Strategic government means, according to the report, that the state must set minimum national standards and help build up capacity in the public sector but [the state] should withdraw where it is no longer needed. Government is reported to still be committed to delivery of the 30 Public Service Agreements. This strategic role will embed a culture of transparent performance assessment and simplification of performance information with greater accessibility by the public to public service information.

Productivity is again highlighted as an area where the UK's public sector will be targeted to ensure greater efficiencies for the increased investment – in particular reference to the fiscal stimulus package brought forward in the pre-budget report in November 2008. Local

government is targeted to achieve £4.9 billion of efficiencies by 2010/2011 through smarter procurement, business process improvements, collaborations and better procurement and assets management.

£30 billion of fixed assets are targeted for sale to allow capital reinvestment in new infrastructure. Of the £30 billion so far £18.3 billion has been realised since 2004/05.

Public sector pay is also highlighted as needing to reflect the recruitment and retention difficulties within a sector and also ensure value for money and consistency with the inflation targets of government.

'Choice and competition' are cited as drivers for service improvements and innovation.

### **APSE comment**

Whilst the report sets out the governments vision for the future of public services much of the report reiterates the various strands of central government policy that are already well rehearsed. It is disappointing however that the report fails to make important links in some areas of policy in respect of the role and capacity of local authorities.

For example whilst recognising the value of collaborative procurement and shared services the report does not reflect the value to the local economy of public sector spending. APSE's own research has identified a positive return for every £1 of public money spent of up to £1.64 which can have a real and lasting benefit on the local economy. Whilst collaborative procurement may produce some headline efficiencies it can be a tipping point in terms of losing the public sector as purchasers and as a major client for local SMEs which can have a negative impact on local jobs, skills and local businesses.

Similarly, whilst referencing the need for transparency and fairness in service delivery and more open performance information, the reports fails to explore some of the early findings of experiments on choice and personalisation. The retention of core capacity within the public sector is a critical balance to the choice agenda. As highlighted in the early findings by the University of York study on the individual budget pilots a good service may carry more weight to the citizen using that service than the concept of 'choice', which ought not to be viewed as a service improvement panacea on its own. Choice of itself does not mean a service has or will continue to improve.

The report does not give sufficient weight to the existing innovation and good practice within public services. Many councils have implemented integrated approaches to neighbourhood management which incorporates targets on fear of crime and incidences of crime, and embeds environmental considerations into the neighbourhood strategies. Such gains have not been made by 'choice and competition' but by service design with inherent flexibilities built into service delivery models. Whilst there is no stated return to purely 'competition' based approaches APSE would caution against accepting the perceived

wisdom that competition will magically produce service improvement. Competition in the absence of ground level knowledge about current service delivery performance, future service requirements and involvement of elected members and the public they represent is unlikely to produce any degree of service improvement. APSE's e-publication '*The competitiveness continuum*' further explores the differences between 'competition' and 'competitiveness' and you may download this by clicking [here](#) . This publication is free of charge to APSE members.

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