



Minister welcomes fresh look at neighbourhoods

Local government minister, John Healey, has welcomed APSE research exploring connections between local governance and delivery of services at a neighbourhood level.

Speaking at a fringe event on *Governance, Neighbourhoods and Service Delivery* at Labour's Spring Conference in Birmingham, the minister highlighted the need for, "**fresh thinking on questions about the public sector workforce**".

Mr Healey told delegates: "**There is a special public service ethos - those who are delivering services to the public believe in what they are doing. If we lose that, it will be impossible to recreate.**"

APSE has commissioned a study, which explores models for providing efficient and accountable services at neighbourhood level, as the second phase of its research programme with the Institute for Local Government Studies (INLOGOV) and the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES).

Speaking at the launch, Dave Prentis, General Secretary of UNISON said: "**Strategic issues are not being talked about. The emphasis has been on commissioning and not delivery of services. Long term contracts with private firms do not provide the flexibility that is needed or make links between global issues, such as climate change, and what happens in neighbourhoods, in the way that direct employment can.**"

Mark Bramah, Assistant Chief Executive of APSE, said: "**The front-line staff who clean the streets, empty the bins and care for elderly people in their homes are the eyes and ears of the community. That day to day contact with citizens should be fed back into service design as much as possible**".

The first part of APSE's research programme, '*Towards A Future for Public Employment*' demonstrated the vital contribution direct employment makes to achieving public value through its role in delivering effective services, enhancing democratic accountability and shaping local places.

Within *Governance, Neighbourhoods and Service Delivery* it is suggested that by maintaining an operational core of services provided by directly employed staff local government will be better able to meet key objectives, such as more localised person centred services and involving local people in decisions about services, under the new Best Value requirements introduced under the new Local Government (and Public Involvement in Health) Act 2007.

Dr Steve Griggs of INLOGOV, who is leading the research, said: **“The ‘neighbourhood’ has become the panacea to a whole range of social, political and economic problems – be it anti-social behaviour, deprivation, substance-misuse or the need for civic renewal. But neighbourhoods can’t do everything; different models of governance and service delivery have different implications”.**

Adding **“Choices and trade-offs have to be made that have not, so far, been made explicit. Our research will explore those choices and trade offs in the context of different local government models.”**

The full research report *Governance, Neighbourhoods and Service Delivery* will be available in mid-March.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

1) APSE (The Association for Public Service Excellence) has over 250 members who provide front-line services in councils across the UK helping local councils develop excellence in front line service delivery, advocating a programme of continuous service improvement.

2) APSE has established a joint research programme with the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) which is a think tank specialising in economic development and regeneration and INLOGOV (The Institute of Local Government Studies at Birmingham University) which spans the boundaries between authoritative research and effective local governance and service provision.

3) The first phase of the programme resulted in the publication of the report *‘Towards a Future for Public Employment’*. The second phase of the programme will explore *Governance, Neighbourhoods and Service Delivery*. The research was outlined in a pamphlet launched at the Conservative Councillors’ Association in Warwickshire on Friday 29 February. The full report will be published in mid-March.

4) Direct public employment is where employees are engaged directly by public sector employers as opposed to employees working on public sector work through contractual or outsourcing arrangements.

5. For further details, a copy of the research pamphlet or to arrange for interview please call Mo Baines at APSE on 0161 772 1810 or mobile 07971 843515 or email mbaines@apse.org.uk