

SHAPING REFORM

Introduction

This paper presents a summary of recommendations from work initiated by the former DFP Minister, Simon Hamilton MLA and commissioned by the Chief Executives' Forum. Facilitated by Queen's University Management School and the Centre for Not-for-profit and Public Sector Research (CNPPSR), the report collates contributions from senior public sector managers towards the Executive's Innovation and Reform Programme.

Recommendations

Four aspects of the Reform agenda were considered – Leadership; Culture Change; Reward and Recognition; and Digitalisation. Several common recommendations emerged, cutting across the discrete areas investigated. A detailed report containing ideas together with literature and resource links has been produced but a synopsis of conclusions arising is set out below with specific recommendations listed at Appendix A.

(i) Develop a Vision

Develop a new approach to public management which emphasises leadership, underpinned by a common vision. The approach should aim to achieve increased public value through innovation, cross-departmental coordination and planning, flexibility and responsiveness. An example referred to is the Scottish Model of Public Leadership with its National Performance Framework which has been used to align the efforts of multiple organisations behind shared objectives. Work has also been conducted locally by the Carnegie UK Trust as part of its 'Towards a Wellbeing Framework' project. In these contexts public sector leaders have a clear view not only of the objectives of their organisation, but also those of other agencies, partners and clients so as to be able to optimise contributions to overall goals.

The vision for public services will be decided politically and work is underway to support the Executive realise improvement. For example, it is expected that the current review by OECD may recommend a more corporate approach to determining needs and priorities. A number of examples providing evidence of progress in this regard were quoted including school's transformation programmes; the new "board structure" for NICS Permanent Secretaries to examine issues holistically; and the creation of the "Partnership Panel" to ensure greater alignment of activities through extended cooperation between government departments and local Councils.

(ii) Design for Delivery

Re-examine organisational roles and responsibilities taking into account opportunities for joined-up working within the public sector and across other sectors. Collective thinking will create economies of scale and uncover synergies and should be facilitated from the outset of programmes and activities. Duplication and low value-added roles should be

removed with resources focussed on agreed priorities. Organisations should be held responsible for collaboration and co-operation.

Progress was observed in measures to develop a citizen focussed, outcomes-based approach to the new Programme for Government - while acknowledging that time and resource will be required to facilitate meaningful engagement and evidence gathering.

Operationally, staff resources may be more productively utilised with flatter hierarchies; new types of recruitment/contracts; job rotation and strategic use of secondments. Evidence of such an approach within the Strategic Investment Board provides a useful precedent.

(iii) Measure Performance

Devise new processes to evaluate progress and enhance public accountability, reflecting new means of delivery and new responsibilities. A revised performance framework should recognise leadership, entrepreneurship, innovation and positive risk taking. This in turn should contribute to the creation of new, flexible, achievement-centred career structures which are supported by performance appraisal systems that measure contributions towards overall public value objectives.

Performance appraisals should focus strongly on team achievement as well as individual attributes and measures should include both short and long term outcomes, assessed beyond political terms, if appropriate. Indicators should be devised as part of a co-production framework and tolerance of failure accepted where defensible risk has been taken. Measures and targets need to be reviewed regularly to ensure currency and intervention directed towards areas of weak performance, while giving good performers greater discretion.

(iv) Enhance staff capacity

Encourage and develop staff to acquire new or advanced skills to meet future challenges. Reform and innovation require a change in attitudes, recognising the need to respond flexibly to changing demands and to acquire new skills. This applies to staff at all levels but particularly those who have leadership positions. Alongside the need for flexibility there is however a case to be made for safeguarding core public sector values, especially among those who drive changes. Successful leadership requires reflection, openness, honesty and confidence. Value will be gained by sharing examples of successful leadership from various sources/sectors within Northern Ireland and beyond. The existing CEF Women's Leadership Initiative for senior managers working in the public service represents a highly successful example of targeted leadership training and talent management that allows existing and future leaders to network, share experiences and ideas, and to provide mutual support.

The creation of a virtual leadership academy to merge practice, research and ideas and provide a platform to mentor and coach future leaders (and develop existing ones) should be considered. In addition to sharing best practice, such provision should contribute to succession planning and the creation of a sustainable cadre of senior Executives locally.

(v) Innovate

Design and implement a comprehensive cross-departmental digitalisation strategy. Based on the existing Enterprise Shared Services framework, this approach should not only modernise current processes but, more importantly, stimulate new, transformational and citizen focussed provision. The ambition is to provide better services at lower cost. Specifically, the strategy should aim to:

- improve communication and facilitate greater engagement with citizens,
- promote a radical shift away from paper-based bureaucracy,
- contribute to increased openness and transparency of the Northern Ireland public sector,
- build trust and promote digital innovation as *an enabler* for improving business processes
- increase accessibility for customers across organisations, and
- exploit digital technology to transform the delivery of services.

Examples of leadership in establishing digitalised services in Estonia were quoted as “outstanding” and provide evidence of where substantial improvement to public services could be realised in Northern Ireland.

Leadership

1. Redefine responsibilities in the public sector to better reflect public needs “thematically”.
2. Build strategic partnerships across government, private and voluntary sectors based on strong joint vision, clear objectives and agreed responsibilities
3. Pursue synergies and create economies of scale through coordinated planning and delivery
4. Embrace open leadership, avoiding blame and being supportive of appropriate risk taking
5. Provide mentoring and coaching between Executives and Non Executive directors, possibly via a cross-sector scheme for future leaders in Northern Ireland
6. Enhance ability to deal with unprecedented economic and demand challenges, for example, using scenario planning
7. Listen to and use staff representatives and Trades Unions as “partners in change”
8. Share examples of good leadership and means of achievement
9. Encourage leadership at all levels, not only amongst senior management
10. Engage more with political parties

Culture Change

11. Review relevance of performance management targets, their contribution to decision making and impact on organisational cultures.
12. Adopt creative approach to efficiency, for example, flexible and part-time contracts; flexible working; job re assignment and re-grading. This should involve new recruitment and contractual arrangements to disseminate new ideas and practices including (a) facilitating movement across organisations (b) establishing term limits for Chief Executive and senior level posts (c) encouraging rotation of senior positions (d) identifying entrepreneurial and innovation skills and assigning accordingly
13. Consider expanding role of Civil Service Commissioners to ensure proper stewardship of new, non traditional contracts and employment schemes.
14. Promote staff engagement and team working within and across organisational boundaries
15. Challenge and rationalise traditional ‘compartmental’ approaches to service provision
16. Expect strategic thinking, recognising interdependencies of actions and plan for collaboration
17. Flatten hierarchies within and across organisations to speed up decision making and reduce adverse effects of ‘gradeism’
18. Establish a NI Public Management Development programme/academy to champion best practice amongst senior executives.
19. Create an enabling mechanism to drive cultural change and support strategies and processes recommended

Rewards and Recognition

20. Employ performance appraisal systems which reflect broader goals and objectives and focus strongly on team achievement as well as individual attributes
21. Measure success against both short and long term outcomes, assessed beyond political terms, if appropriate
22. Revise reporting requirements/performance targets with a view towards targeting attention to areas of weak performance, while giving good performers greater discretion
23. Provide personalised career discussions to assist staff form and achieve aspirations and permit individuals greater responsibility and an element of control
24. Promote responsibility and address morale issues through genuine staff engagement where objectives and parameters are clear
25. Utilise symbolic activities such as site visits, casual workdays, team breakfasts etc (avoiding gimmicks) while demonstrating that recognition/reward is an ongoing feature of management rather than one-off events
26. Promote achievements and acknowledge good work externally, using opportunities to develop public appreciation and enhance engagement with citizens

Digitalisation

27. Address verification and authentication of individual identities to create a universal citizen contact system, potentially with a bespoke citizen e-mail.
28. Continue development of a comprehensive citizen contact strategy to exploit available digital technology and transform delivery of public services.
29. Commence an in-depth review of existing needs and processes to maximise benefits from IT utilisation which (a) focuses initial efforts on the most promising services; b) separates essential from desirable features; c) avoids collection of unnecessary information; and d) provides and evaluates relevant and reliable outcome measurements.
30. Facilitate involvement of academia and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to help innovate system and process design through Digitalisation.
31. Progress specific items to underpin a common suite of government services including:
 - (i) Create a single citizen portal for public services
 - (ii) Design easy to use, customer friendly websites
 - (iii) Replicate agreed design features
 - (iv) Agree appropriate branding including review of logo usage
 - (v) Provide appropriate customer service mechanisms to handle complex cases
 - (vi) Prioritise systems security to ensure public trust

Closing

There is clear awareness that some existing approaches and patterns of working require radical rethinking in order to meet future public requirements and funding availability. Recommendations suggested within this report will need to filter up into a concrete programme of public sector reform which identifies and prioritises areas where process re-engineering and organisational redesign are required. These decisions require political will.

This report confirms a readiness and appetite for reform among senior and chief executives. The Chief Executives' Forum is pleased to have been involved in the submission and grateful to the Queen's University Management School and CNPPSR for completing the report.

Chief Executives' Forum

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