

Meeting 4, 5 and progress report

Meeting note from the fourth and fifth meetings, and progress report of the Commission on Public Service Governance and Delivery.

Over the past three weeks the Commission has held a number of meetings to hear oral evidence from organisations and individuals. This includes formal meetings of the Commission and also public meetings, at the National Eisteddfod and Royal Welsh Show and in Wrexham, Cardiff, Llandudno Junction and Newtown.

During this period the Commission has heard evidence from: the Children's Commissioner for Wales; the Older People's Commissioner for Wales; the Welsh Language Commissioner; several Local Authority Chief Executives; Health Service Chairs and Chief Executives; the Bevan Commission; the Ambulance Service; the Public Service Ombudsman; Academi Wales; Police Chief Constables; Macmillan Cancer Care; Hafal; The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales ; the Federation of Small Businesses; Anheddau Cyf; Youth Cymru; the Women's Institute; several Town, Community and County Councillors from across Wales; representatives of the third sector; and members of the public.

These sessions have all proved very useful. The Commission has taken evidence and gathered information under each of its six themes (that is performance; scale and capability; complexity; culture and leadership; governance, delivery and scrutiny; and the role of Welsh Government). The Commission is open to evidence until mid September and welcome as many views as possible.

Below is a summary of some of the key issues emerging through the evidence that the Commission has heard. It should be noted that:

- these are the recurring points only, not all points that have been raised
- the Commission has not yet come to any conclusions on these issues
- the points are not necessarily written from a balanced perspective
- the Commission is still hearing evidence and therefore further points will be raised

Performance

- Although public perceptions of services in Wales are relatively positive, and not withstanding the efforts of the dedicated public sector workforce, performance

measures and international comparisons show that public services in Wales are often not delivering effectively for users.

- The majority of evidence has highlighted the inconsistent, and often poor, performance across public services in Wales. Demographic trends and austerity measures are likely to increase pressure on services in the short, medium and long term.
- The presentation of performance data makes it difficult for the public to understand the performance of public services. Data is often technical and written in complex language, there is a myriad of indicators leading to confusion, and meaningful UK and international comparisons are affected by quality of data collected.
- There is an emphasis on targets which can be a barrier to service delivery. There is a common desire to move to an 'outcomes' based approach.
- Performance Management is 'patchy' and should be more transparent, systematic and standardised.

Scale and Capability

- Although some small organisations perform well, and some large organisations perform poorly, many people have identified links between the scale of public service organisations and their capacity to deliver consistent high quality services – particularly during times of change. This can be due to a lack of depth and breadth of capability in small organisations and therefore their resilience (for example an over reliance on one or two key individuals).
- Wales has a large number of public service providers and this can lead to confusion and inconsistency in service delivery.
- There are varying views on whether structural change is the answer.
- Larger organisations benefit from economies of scale but can suffer from a lack of connection with local people; this is a balance that must be considered.
- Leadership, culture and values are often recognised as being more important factors than organisational size (see leadership and culture) but there are links between the two, for example smaller organisations may find it harder to attract and retain the highest calibre leaders.

Complexity

- The public service delivery environment is crowded leading to duplication and complexity.

- Voluntary collaboration between organisations has had minimal impact and has been seen to create further issues such as a dilution of accountability and duplication of activity. There seems to be support for a more prescriptive approach to establishing collaborations and partnerships.
- Some senior leaders have pointed out that whilst partnership working is important, it can distract organisations from fulfilling their principal responsibility for becoming as operationally efficient and effective as possible.
- Co-terminosity of boundaries is seen as important both in terms of service delivery and managing relationships.
- Silo working across all sectors is an ongoing barrier. There should be a focus on designing and delivering services around the citizen.
- A common example of complex service delivery has been the provision of health care and adult social care. Some evidence has advocated further integration between health and adult social care in order to improve services for the user.

Governance, Delivery and Scrutiny

- Accountability and governance frameworks are complex and inconsistent across the public sector in Wales. There is ambiguity in accountability which needs to be removed.
- It has been acknowledged that the quality of scrutiny is variable and scrutiny models vary across organisations. In some instances cross cutting scrutiny has helped overcome silo working and driven improvement. There is also no clear picture of what guidance is available on scrutiny.
- Some evidence has highlighted the need for greater service user/citizen involvement in scrutiny, although the challenges in encouraging this engagement have been recognised.
- Alternative delivery models should be considered, with co-production, cooperatives and mutuals being raised as options for future service delivery.
- Best Practice is not consistently applied, shared, identified and evaluated.

Culture and Leadership

- Leadership, that is strategic and operational leadership at all levels of the organisation, is seen as key to the successful delivery of public services.
- It has been widely recognised that leadership in Wales could be improved.
- The pool of good quality leaders within Wales is small and does not match the number of public service organisations. There needs to be a focus on identifying and developing future leaders and managers at all levels.

- There needs to be a recognisable career path within the Public Services in Wales. Staff should be able to move from one part of the public service to another in order to improve leadership skills and break down silo working.
- Culturally, there has been some evidence that public service organisations in Wales lack ambition and aspiration; they are content with performing adequately in comparison with their counterparts rather than striving to perform well against international benchmarks.
- Public services in Wales are reluctant to innovate and where innovation does exist it is in small pockets. Organisations need a clear vision with linked objectives and empowered individuals who are able to deliver services locally in a way that best meets need.
- A set of consistent public sector values would be welcomed across all sectors.

Role of Welsh Government

- The role of Welsh Government has matured since devolution and needs to be considered in the context of Wales wide public service governance and delivery.
- It has been very clear that stakeholders see an essential and central role for the Welsh Government in providing leadership and direction to the whole sector. In responding so far, stakeholders have noted that looking ahead there are opportunities to do more in this area and that this would be welcomed. There are challenges in improving the visibility of Welsh Government's priorities and policies throughout the delivery chain and the consistent adoption of measureable objectives, or outcomes.
- Stakeholders have noted both the need for Welsh Government to set the strategic agenda giving providers the freedom to deliver and the need to prescribe outcomes and mandate best practice.
- In a small connected country like Wales, they also considered that greater engagement with others on policy development and ensuring joined up thinking would be welcomed and should be possible. There was a view that the Welsh Government may not consistently be using the most appropriate levers and mechanisms at its disposal. In particular there might therefore be an opportunity to further move away from grants as a policy instrument and thus focus more on outputs than inputs.