

Public Sector Reform - urgent questions needing answers

The government has announced major structural reform of the public sector on a scale unseen since devolution, but with very few details. Even the 'what?' and 'how?' of the proposals are currently missing.

Ministers say there has been active ongoing engagement with trade unions around these plans. But engagement to date has been preliminary and lacking in detail. That remains the case one month into a 3-month period of consultation on the future of social care and local government. We want to engage constructively, but you cannot have effective engagement based on guess work.

It is difficult for MSPs to judge whether the government's plans for social care, the NHS, local government and NDPBs will improve services for people, or are feasible or realistic, in the absence of evidence around workforce planning, financial modelling, business cases, options appraisals and impact assessments. Structural reform of this kind and scale has expensive upfront costs and takes years. Yet the government's strategies and plans frame these reforms in terms of fiscal sustainability, with targets for spending cuts now and over the next few years, which appears contradictory.

For UNISON's 150,000 members who deliver public services across Scotland, these are the questions that need answered.

Overall

1. Is there evidence indicating whether and how these structural changes will improve services on the ground to individuals & communities?
2. What impacts would these structural reforms have on the workforces in social care, local government, the NHS and NDPBs? How do you define 'back office' and 'frontline' jobs and can you give examples in each sector?
3. Have Equality Impact Assessments been undertaken for the PSR strategy and each of its workstreams?
4. Do these reforms include insourcing plans for public services as a means of securing financial efficiencies and meeting public interests e.g. in social care and bus services?
5. What effect will these structural reforms have on delivering commitments to fair work and community wealth building?

Local Government

The proposal is for the current **32 councils to be replaced with 6-10** large regional authorities and **120-160** small community authorities.

1. Who will be the employer: the regional or the community authorities or both?
2. Will regional economic partnership areas form the basis for the regional authorities?
3. Which powers and resources would be devolved to local government?
4. What statutory duties and responsibilities will sit with each tier of government? What is the underpinning rationale and evidence base for this?

5. What impact would these new arrangements have on local democracy and accountability?
6. Does the government support the Wilson review proposals to remove education governance from local authorities?
7. What will be the relationship between regional authorities and their constituent community authorities and how will this work? Will these both be independent legal entities?
8. What are the estimated financial costs of this reorganisation and who will bear these?
9. If savings are envisaged from this restructure, across which years will these be realised, and how does this align with the financial targets and timescales set out in the PSR Strategy & MTFS?
10. Who will levy council tax – the regional or community authorities?

Social Care

The government intends the NHS to be the lead body for social care.

1. How is 'social care' defined: will the NHS be the lead body for social services as a whole? How will responsibilities between councils and the NHS be divided?
2. How will accountability work across health and social care services?
3. Will the introduction of sectoral bargaining for outsourced social care be affected if social care becomes an NHS responsibility? Will social care budgets be pooled differently?
4. Will local government social care staff move onto NHS Agenda for Change conditions?
5. Where will responsibility for social care commissioning and procurement sit?
6. What will happen to the current Integration Authorities (Integration Joint Boards and the Health and Social Care Partnerships)?

NHS

The Government has indicated that it wishes to move from **14 territorial health boards to two strategic mainland boards**, while retaining separate arrangements for island communities and reviewing arrangements for special boards:

1. Whilst welcoming commitments to no compulsory redundancies, what does that mean in an NHS context. Will it be confirmed that current Organisational Change agreements will be honoured?
2. Given the detrimental impact of a recruitment freeze on current delivery, how is it proposed to deal with the high level of vacancies in the short term?
3. Is there a proposal to develop voluntary severance and early retirement in the context of NHS proposals?
4. What steps will be put in place to ensure that existing Health Boards do not take measures that have a lasting impact/ detriment? Will there be a moratorium on non-essential capital spend and privatisation of services for example?
5. What does the review of Special Health Boards look like, how will it be configured and how will staff and trade unions be consulted?
6. The decision to restructure the NHS will emphasis and underline existing pay disparities between staff across the country doing broadly the same work. Will commitments be given to level up pay and ensure that workers are treated fairly during this restructure?
7. There are a number of commitments to review other services in the Programme for Government, how and when will staff/ trade unions be consulted on these reviews?
8. Does this announcement mean that staff who have already been identified to come forward as part of the Sub National Planning process have an unfair advantage in any future recruitment process?
9. In the context of single authority models for the islands, what steps will be taken to ensure that national unions and staff are properly consulted on these issues?
10. What steps will be taken to respond to staff concerns around flexibility/mobility clauses, shared services and other emerging issues that will concern NHS workers?

NDPBs

1. Which NDPBs are likely to be subsumed into the proposed 6-10 regional local authorities?
2. What evidence was considered when the decision to consolidate environmental agencies was taken? What evidence is there of duplication of work across these agencies?
3. What impact assessments have been undertaken of the likely impact of this consolidation on rural Scotland and island communities?
4. What lessons have been learned from the deficiencies and failures of the reform of post-school education, to ensure that future PSR is more successful?

UNISON's tests for public service reform

UNISON will test all public service reform proposals against the following principles:

Democracy – the devolution and decentralisation of decision-making and control of services to the most appropriate local democratic structure. Public bodies should as far as possible be directly elected and quangos democratised.

- the maximisation of local democratic control and accountability for how services are delivered.

Partnership - public services should be designed and delivered in partnership through the genuine participation of citizens, users and staff.

Fairness –public service reforms should be carried out through a fair process and achieve fair outcomes including the fair treatment of staff. Reforms should achieve fair and equitable outcomes across the country and avoid disadvantage to rural and island communities or worsening inequality within them.

Investment - excellent, fair, and democratic public services cannot happen without adequate long-term investment. Reform should not be a byword for cuts to services, which have already been stripped to the bone.

Excellence - Scotland's public services should, and could, be world leading and performance should be measured appropriately. Cutting costs and outsourcing ends up costing more both financially, and in service quality.

For further information:

UNISON Scotland Public Service Reform briefings are available here: [Briefings - UNISON Scotland](#)

UNISON's submission to the PSR Committee's pre-budget scrutiny [is here](#).

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