

Local Government Reform

Back to basics...what are the benefits?

February 2013

Introduction

By April 2015, there will be 11 new councils. The vision is to have “a thriving, dynamic local government that creates vibrant, healthy, prosperous, safe and sustainable communities that have the needs of the citizens at their core.”

So what does this actually mean? What will be the end benefits of this reform programme? Below are some key messages, identifying the benefits, to help guide your communications.

Key benefits

The two overriding key benefits relate to service provision and long-term cost savings:

1. Improved service provision

Councils are being given new responsibilities and a broader range of powers. Combined with partnership working with other Departments and agencies operating in their areas, this will make councils stronger, more effective and flexible to local need. They will be able to better co-ordinate service delivery and avoid duplication, leading to more efficient, high quality services.

2. Long-term cost savings

The potential long term financial benefits are substantial as amalgamating 26 councils into 11 brings with it economies of scale. The costs and benefits of reform are currently being examined to take account of the 2015 programme timetable, the sector's Improvement, Collaboration and Efficiency proposals and the current economic climate in which reform is now being taken forward.

In addition, below are supplementary messages on the benefits of transferring functions, new responsibilities, governance, service delivery and performance management.

Transferring functions

- It is not just about doing things differently – it is about doing things better, by transferring functions from central to local government.
- Regrouping a number of key functions such as planning, urban regeneration, local economic development and local tourism, will give councils some powerful tools with which to shape their areas and communities.
- The integration of these functions, combined with councils' existing functions, will allow for a more productive, joined-up approach which makes the most of opportunities and best uses all the strengths available. It will change the way we plan our cities, towns and rural areas, and will place a sharper focus on sustainable local economic development. It will allow local people to influence and make decisions on local business development, infrastructure provision, job creation and economic competitiveness.
- The transfer of local economic development functions in particular offers the opportunity for councils, the private sector and the third sectors to work together to improve the local economy.
- Councils should also have a strengthened role in ensuring that the local investment climate fits the needs of local businesses; supporting small and medium size enterprises, encouraging the formation of new businesses, attracting external investment and generally supporting the growth of business in their local areas.

New responsibilities

- Councils are to be given more power at a local level, as they will lead and facilitate a community planning process. This will enable councils, in partnership with other public service providers and departments, to influence how and where services are provided, allowing for a more flexible approach to meet local needs without duplication. Importantly, community planning will also place a duty on key departments and agencies to be engaged in the community planning process and to have regard for the community plan when considering how best to deliver services at local level. This should help the public sector as a whole to maximise the impact of public spend.
- Councils' new duty to make arrangements for community planning will place elected representatives at the forefront of local service delivery. Through effective community engagement and an understanding of local issues, delivery of services will be more responsive to the needs of citizens.

Governance

- The creation of strong, modern, statutory governance arrangements will provide for proportionality and greater openness in the operation of councils and their decision making.
- An ethical standards regime will be established to include a mandatory local government code of conduct.
- The broader range of services and functions delivered at local council level will mean that there will be more accountable decision making.

Service delivery & performance management

- New, innovative and creative models of service delivery will be developed to promote modern and efficient practice by grouping councils together for the delivery of significant services, such as planning and regeneration.
- Systems of performance management will be introduced which will support innovative and efficient practice.
- Community planning is a long term and evolving process, therefore service delivery will continuously improve over time.