

**Efficient Government Event
Roseberry House
18th March, 2008**

Issues/ Questions Raised at the Event

Please note questions are in black text and the response given on the day is in blue.

Q1. "We're here today to learn from other councils and share best practice. Will information be made available such as the top 10 hotspots for efficiency savings as identified among councils? This could be used as a means of highlighting priorities for attention."

"We want to promote sharing of best practice in a formal, structured way. This will be discussed in greater detail during the afternoon workshops."

Q2. "Could the panel comment on organisational development and organisational competency and compatibility to deliver? Has this been successful?"

"This was not part of the research carried out. I can say that there is an issue around capacity – the number and skill-set available to drive forward reconfiguration activity. This is embedded in the roles of service managers and is not at the forefront of thinking. Executive Directors are more interested in outcomes. Councils are strategically better placed now than in the past. In the past there has been disinvestment in services. This has not been apparent this time."

Q.3 "Regarding Colin's statement about looking forward – Will the Scottish Government be looking for a statement from Local Authorities highlighting where efficiencies are being invested?"

"No. Scottish Government want to see Local Government reaching the 2% target, but LAs will get to keep efficiencies. There is a broad level view as regards reporting requirements. Benefits will be drawn out within Local Government. There is no indication from Scottish Government that they are looking for detailed reporting. COSLA want to keep it this way. There will be guidance to help define efficiencies."

"Scottish Government don't want to micro-manage. LAs will be allowed to exercise local discretion."

Q.4 "Scottish Government is interested in how Local Authorities are delivering Concordat commitments. How does this relate to efficiencies and Local Authority statements regarding savings and investment? Is it the case that an efficiency is not in fact an efficiency unless re-investment is clearly demonstrated?"

“There are differences between the Manifesto and Concordat commitments. Some commitments are not about individual councils.”

Q.5. “Is there an issue around consistency between private auditors and Audit Scotland and is there a need for greater consistency?”

“Having worked for Audit Scotland, I’d say they offer a more in-depth audit. They spend more time auditing and ask more probing questions. However, they are not always as thorough as private auditors. There is also an issue around the independence of auditors and their position which allows them to make individual judgements and decisions themselves. Auditors would argue however, that they have discretion to undertake a particular type of audit.”

Q.6 “I’ve had an informal discussion with Lynn at Audit Scotland about the need for Audit Scotland to go into greater detail – there are concerns that some auditors may have another agenda.”

“I refer to Derek’s presentation – Efficiency statements are a council’s own to use in their own circumstances. However, this is a sharing opportunity. The statements are not there to be audited, but as the right thing for LAs. While there is a requirement to make a statement regarding efficiency savings, the real use is to share best practice.”

Q.7 “I’d like to discuss the issue around converting efficiencies. What method has proven most successful toward achieving outcomes?”

“The people we spoke to during our research seem to have a better understanding of the agenda. Previously Service Managers made the assumption that efficiency savings agenda was corporate and should deliver x%. This was a less common view among the people we spoke to this time. There are still politics involved in demonstrating efficiencies, but we are primarily looking for opportunities for service improvement. We are driven by perspective not mechanisms. The people we spoke to understood the agenda is about modernisation, partnerships, new IT systems etc. and it has become straightforward how to approach this.”

“This is something that is being done through Public Service Improvement Framework (PSIF).”

Q.8 “Some organisations have adopted the philosophy of Performance Management more than others and have proven to be more effective as such. Could the panel please comment?”

“We can’t make that statement about any council or service. There are pockets of enthusiasm within councils for performance management. For example, as regards CRM systems, some councils spent a lot on this and are articulate as regards their progress and successes – but if

you look closer, there are other running similar programs with similar progress – but not all service managers are on board.”

Q.9 “There are issues regarding answering questions about efficiency savings from the Health Board. How can we avoid double counting and clarify who owns the process and who is responsible for what?”

“I recognise that there is a worry that social work is delivering Health Board efficiencies. There is scope for more work on collaborative gain. If we can show what this would look like, this could point to a straightforward opportunity to drive partnerships.”

Questions arising from presentation “Measuring Efficiency”

Q.10 “Jonathan Sharma mentioned that feedback to Audit Scotland would be an aggregate form composed by COSLA and not individual Local Authorities. Does the Diagnostic Tool reflect this?”

“This is more project focused. We await detail from Audit Scotland.”

“Audit Scotland don’t have a formulated approach. It will be high level, covering the whole of the public sector not just local authorities. This is a project case study example-based approach. This is what we mean by diagnostic. It is not a formal approach.”

Q.11 “Will COSLA be looking for evidence from Local Authorities to complete the aggregate report?”

“Local Authorities should provide an efficiency statement to COSLA who will develop an aggregate statement.”

Q.12 “Would it be more effective to have a facilitated Community of Practice or an Aspiren User Group? There could be an argument for the latter.”

“An Aspiren User Group stream could be incorporated into the Community of Practice.”

Q.13 “I’d like to discuss the previously mentioned issue around politician engagement and the value placed on this process by the current and future government administrations. I’m concerned the Government may become carried away. While this works for some Local Authorities, it may not work for all. Despite this, it may become compulsory for everyone if we over-engage with politicians.”

“The re-engagement of politicians is a much broader issue. Concerns about this becoming compulsory in future will be taken on board.”

“Re-engagement from a COSLA point of view relates to the aggregate return and efficiency targets – which leaders will be kept informed of.”

We will report to the executive group on today's workshop and findings, so politicians will be kept within the sphere. It is important to have a sense of ownership and responsibility."

Questions arising from presentation "Shared Services Diagnostic: Supporting Efficiency"

Q.14 "I have some worries about the process. The Diagnostic project should allow us to move toward Shared Services for the best reasons. Some people feel the driver must move to Shared Services. I think this will eventually happen and the Diagnostic will combat any negative views."

"We want to remove barriers to sharing – a Shared Services label with resonance in policy terms. The message is that it's part of the answer, but it's still a few years away."

Q.15 "The Diagnostic Tool looks at areas where there is scope for improvement or efficiency. The model should eliminate waste to simplify processes. Does it pick up these issues as regards the progress organisations have made with this?"

"Yes, we will pick up on this. However, it won't come from data, but rather interviews and workshops."

Q.16 "How has the project been taken forward with the Pathfinders? Where are Glasgow and Edinburgh in progress terms now?"

"They are working on the design phase of the project. There have been some adjustments as they didn't start in the same place and they are re-visiting where they have gotten to. The issue is the practicality of converting opportunities and designs into what we are doing in reality."

Q.17 "What is the timescale for Edinburgh and Glasgow in moving forward?"

"Glasgow and Edinburgh will have completed the design phase by June."

Q.18 "What sources of leading practice are available?"

"There are publicly available resources, benchmarks, internet and local case studies. We worked with some local councils last week on how to use this information and put together some principles – indicators on leading practice principles."

Questions arising from presentation “Customer First: Further Exploiting the Infrastructure for Efficiency”

Q.19 “Are you working towards a standard CRM system among all councils?”

“In the earlier model there was a demand to create a CRM system. However, some councils have already created a CRM solution. It is an expensive process. We have to look at what CRM is designed to deliver. Procuring a system is a collaborative decision. If we deploy CRM as a solution at the centre of the infrastructure and connect to 10-12 councils, others can reserve the right to join. If others want to procure themselves that’s fine and we’d be willing to host it centrally. We have a national contract with a CRM supplier. The CRM model is still maturing. We would like a hosted solution as this is cheaper.”

Q.20 “Colin mentioned Customer First in relation to capital spending, where we’re going etc. Has there been any dialogue with CPPs? This will be relevant going forward with SOAs as it becomes a more end-to-end process in which partners are included.”

“The previous administration took a leap of faith here. They invested and LAs invested. It may expand or be extended and we need to make provision for this. We need a sustainability model in order to sustain services needing revenue support. For example, the NHS want a secure infrastructure. The IS have said we have this across 32 Councils and we can build from that, using the same authentication rather than spend on a new infrastructure. Also, as discussed, we can push information using the system to any other public service organisation, such as changes to address, birth and death notifications etc. This would be a pointless service however, if the organisation don’t have a CRM compatible system.”

Q.21 “How are you tracking efficiencies to know if there is proving to be ROI?”

“We are concentrating on some LAs. It can be argued that not all public sector organisation are built around ROI, but rather investment to see improvement. It is not always about efficiency savings. We are looking for current opportunities to reduce overheads at the same time by addressing current business opportunities.”

Further general questions arising from afternoon presentations

Please note: These questions are currently being considered by the Improvement Service. Answers to follow.

Q.22 “There seems to be an issue around identifying time-releasing savings. We’ve gotten to a situation where we can’t get a particular FTE out of the system. How are others managing this?”

Q.23 “Regards working with other Public Sector bodies – particularly Health – there is difficulty getting buy-in. The Health Board seem more likely to follow a National deliverable than a locally driven one – and this is perhaps therefore not worth pursuing with them, particularly as some councils have more than one Health board in their area. Can you comment on this?”

Q.24 “There don’t seem to be as many efficiency statements from larger departments such as Education, as expected. Is this common among all councils? Are efficiencies mainly corporate?”

Q.25 “Efficiency savings appear to have too many streams. For example, the Education Department want each school to have their own list of efficiency savings. Can you comment on the effects of such inner-council transformation?”