

PSR Dialogue Dinners: Feb 2008 - June 2010

Key Issues

### Context

During the first term of the minority SNP Government, the CSPP ran a number of “dialogue dinners” to develop their thinking on public service reform (PSR)<sup>1</sup>. Each dinner allowed a select group to discuss policy and practise with the respective Cabinet Secretary or senior Civil Servant. In total, seven dinners took place on:

- Overall approach to PSR
- Transport and climate change
- Enterprise
- Health and wellbeing
- Education
- Housing
- Justice

These dinners were structured around three key policy drivers. (1) Moving from supply to demand management. (2) Introducing local democratic drivers in the delivery of public services. (3) Developing common ownership in public services through co-production and public engagement.

### Dinner 1 - PSR Approach with Cabinet Sec for Growth John Swinney MSP

- I. John Swinney (JS) outlined the Govt’s approach to PSR, emphasising the importance of clarity of purpose - namely, to improve sustainable economic growth. It was this key aim, along with five strategic objectives<sup>2</sup>, that would create greater alignment across the public sector.
- II. Indeed, the alignment of public services to Govt strategy was *the* dominant theme. JS argued that every public sector body should be asking the question “how are we contributing to the economic prosperity of Scotland” on a daily basis.
- III. Simplification was a key theme. In the short term JS pointed to reducing the number of NDPBs, while in the long term the key objective was to “morph” all organisations into a single/unified public service to avoid bad practice.
- IV. A transformation had taken place in how local and central government engaged with each other (the Concordat<sup>3</sup>) thanks to the Govt’s “localisation agenda”. Critically, this new arrangement will ensure that each council’s priorities are aligned with those of the Govt and solidify the importance of partnership working.
- V. The creation of a robust and transparent performance management framework ([Scotland Performs](#)) will ensure that the Govt focuses on outputs not inputs.

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<sup>1</sup> These discussions were hosted by principal series sponsors DLA Piper and supported by Grant Thornton, Rockpools and the Scottish Health Council.

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/Strategic-Objectives>

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/923/0054147.pdf>

PSR Dialogue Dinners: Feb 2008 - June 2010

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### **Dinner 2 - Transport & Environment with Cabinet Sec Stewart Stevenson MSP**

- I. The key challenges facing the new administration are: (1) the continued rise in traffic and car use in Scotland and (2) the conflicting needs of the tackling climate change and promoting sustainable economic growth.
- II. The key projects the Govt will deliver are: Kincardine Bridge, M74, AWPR, Rail Electrification, and Rail Franchise extension.
- III. Reducing the need to travel was a core theme. Solutions include: improving public transport links and the frequency of services and addressing supply/demand policies relating to peak hour public transport use re: tolls, congestion charging etc.
- IV. The Scottish Govt should be spending less on roads but this will only be realised in the medium term.
- V. People and destinations have to move closer together, while the costs of transport should be expressed in carbon.

### **Dinner 3 - Enterprise with Cab Sec Jim Mather MSP**

- I. A main achievement of the SNP Govt has been to create a climate where the people of Scotland now share the Govt's ambition for moving Scotland forward.
- II. The Govt will create the conditions to stimulate private sector growth and create an "enterprising" public sector. It will achieve this by clearly articulating a coherent and consistent vision and purpose.
- III. Key elements of a successful and sustainable economic future for Scotland are: to become a learning society; improve its infrastructure; remove business and economic inhibitors; and to be more innovative.
- IV. The role of Central Govt in an enterprising public sector is to create overall targets, order, purpose and ambitious outcomes.
- V. The planning process and procurement system is overly complex and bureaucratic, unresponsive and works against the interests of small and medium sized companies (private and third sector).

### **Dinner 4 - Health and Wellbeing with Cab Sec Nicola Sturgeon MSP**

- I. Health plays a fundamental part in supporting the Govt's key objective in that, for example, a healthier population would result in a more productive workforce and lead to greater wealth.
- II. As *the* major employer in Scotland, the NHS has enormous leverage and influence when it comes to tackling poverty and inequality and contributing to national economic growth.
- III. The NHS has not punched its weight in terms of economic impact but great potential exists to drive partnerships between industry, academia and the NHS.
- IV. Different models of care have to be embraced that, for instance, bring primary care and social care together in partnership with acute services.
- V. Democratising health boards is not simply about adding a democratic layer but achieving a fundamental change in their relationship with the public who will become active members of a mutual, co-produced health service.

PSR Dialogue Dinners: Feb 2008 - June 2010  
Key Issues

**Dinner 5 - Education with Andrew Scott, Director of Lifelong Learning, Scottish Government**

- I. The outlook for further and higher education is somewhat bleak. Without the income stream that English institutions secure from fees, provision may be cut more severely in Scotland which would have an adverse impact on the ability of education to contribute to economic recovery.
- II. Scotland has a well-resourced school system but it produces “average outputs compared with other countries”. Scotland’s workforce is well qualified, but does not have comparatively high levels of productivity.
- III. Providing opportunities for training and education is no guarantee that the training and education will be applied effectively in the workplace.
- IV. You cannot solely concentrate on what occurs in the classroom. Instead, a holistic approach must be adopted to tackle the social exclusion that prevents academic progression in low income households.
- V. Maintaining the same number of institutions may lead to an overall decline in funding for each institution, leading to a descent into mediocrity in the medium to long term.

**Dinner 6 - Housing with Cab Sec Alex Neil MSP**

- I. Scotland has not “cracked the housing situation since the Industrial Revolution”; it has sacrificed “quality of housing for quantity”; and in the past it has been “obsessed with home ownership”.
- II. High quality housing is hugely important to the Scottish economy. It enables children to realise their educational potential and also prevents a whole raft of health problems. Question marks remain, however, on the lack of alignment between housing and the Govt’s core objective.
- III. Contemporary challenges include: (1) supply & investment in affordable housing; (2) a lack of “real quality” in our housing stock; (3) climate change & funding; and (4) demographic pressures.
- IV. The Govt has a commitment to “revolutionise” housing policy but admits that this will be difficult against a backdrop of public debt – a common strand across all PSR.
- V. If we are to envisage a mixed tenure the stigmatisation between the public and private housing must be changed because it is “easy to spot affordable housing”.

**Dinner 7 - Justice with Frank Mulholland QC, Solicitor General**

- I. A fair criminal justice system must be transparent, user friendly, cost effective and retain public confidence.
- II. The justice system has experienced significant changes in the past 20 years. For example, (1) there is a distinct lack of experienced staff in middle management that can bridge the divide between the inexperienced prosecutors and more senior levels; (2) there has been a vast increase in bureaucratic tasks associated with criminal prosecution demanding more resources; (3) and a higher degree of public scrutiny has resulted in a general trend towards more conservative decision-making.
- III. Looking forward, numerous developments could take place: (1) the public need to be further involved in the justice process; (2) better use of alternative prosecutions such as

## PSR Dialogue Dinners: Feb 2008 - June 2010

### Key Issues

- mediation/reparation, extended sentence and plea bargaining would increase accountability; (3) and sentencing policy should be subject to public input, for instance through a sentencing council that includes lay persons.
- IV. Involving the victim more in the justice process and shifting the emphasis away from punitive justice and onto restorative justice could be a way forward.
- V. There must be a stronger emphasis on keeping young offenders out of the adult system as this will only increase the rates of re-offending.