



Japan Local Government Centre, London

Monthly Report for March 2010 (England) – Putting the Frontline First: Meeting the Local Government Challenge

Background

In late December 2009 the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government John Denham announced the creation of a Task Force to examine ways in which councils could realise immediate financial savings in order to cope with the recession, while still protecting frontline services. The Task Force's deadline was set as February, in order for its recommendations to be considered in time for the Budget 2010 in March.

Mr Denham appointed two local government leaders to jointly lead the work, Mayor Sir Steve Bullock (London Borough of Lewisham) and Cllr Sir Richard Leese (Manchester City Council). The Task Force also included the chief executives of the Local Government Association, Local Government Employers, the Audit Commission and the Chartered Institute of Public Finance Accountancy, as well as the Unison trade union and several local authority chief executives. The Task Force's remit was to:

- examine the potential of local authority management restructuring including the benefits of shared chief executives
- how sharing services with other authorities and with other public sector bodies can deliver efficiency savings
- how to reduce the impact of senior pay through transparency and affordable pay benchmarks
- how to free up and motivate staff to drive forward more innovative frontline services
- how to reduce overlap and duplication of work in between district and county councils in two-tier areas
- how to improve capacity and innovate to meet citizens' needs, including benchmarking back offices and non-essential bureaucratic positions

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Putting the Frontline First: Meeting the Local Government Challenge

The Task Force published its report in February 2010 and concluded that councils can no longer continue with the status quo relying on tried and tested approaches to reduce budgets - they need to make a more radical and strategic shift to protect services for the customer. The report also includes practical advice for councils telling them how to go about the process, where to find help and examples of savings that can be achieved by making changes. Regional efficiency experts will provide advice and support to councils.

Welcoming the report, John Denham said: *“Councils have some tough choices in the next few years as things become tighter. But that is no reason to lower their sights on service quality people rightly value. Government is working hard to make sure councils have explored every possible option before resorting to wholesale budget cuts that will affect frontline services and jobs.*

“Local people will rightly be intolerant if they are told that front line services will be cut because their council hasn't done everything suggested on this checklist. If councils adopt our radical efficiency reforms they can protect our top priority frontline services which matter most to local people.”

The ten things councils must do to protect frontline services

- 1. Council services must be focused on the customer. They come first.*
- 2. Take a Total Place approach to frontline services*
- 3. Make services more efficient - cutting out waste and unnecessary duplication - especially in two-tier areas*
- 4. Check performance against others and learn from who is doing it better*
- 5. Buy goods and services in groups and use that buying power to create local benefits and involve the third sector*
- 6. Reduce the number of council buildings by locating more services together*
- 7. Motivate staff to help to perform to the best of their ability*
- 8. Make managers leaders of innovation to improve services*
- 9. Streamline management. Consider splitting senior posts with other councils or PCTs.*
- 10. Share professional expertise and ensure council staff are able to be flexibly deployed*

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