

## Sinn Fein response to PWC Local Service Delivery Report

Sinn Fein believes in devolving local powers and local democracy to local government in the north but only if firmly rooted in the strong principles of Equality of participation and Equality of access to the services being delivered within the local authorities. The access of the existing services to the citizen currently being delivered by local government and the additional services which are being proposed to be delivered by local government under the Review of Public Administration need to be delivered in a value for money basis and also by ensuring that no additional burden is passed on to the ratepayer without marked and identifiable improvements to the services being provided. Within the RPA process the ratepayer should not have to countenance any increase in local rates without any marked increase in the delivery of cost effective and efficient local services. The RPA process was initiated by DOE and it would be unfair for local ratepayers pay for the process.

The review of public administration presents local government within the six-counties with an important opportunity to design optimum models of service delivery for the 11 new councils. Sinn Fein recognise that it may not be possible to have a one size fits all model option due to the different nuances within the new councils. Because of the different priorities and uniqueness of each of the new council areas there may need to be some flexibility into how these areas either deliver or share their services. The PWC report presents a number of models and options that could be taken forward for future delivery of local government functions. We believe that there are obvious opportunities for cost-effective benefits to be made through savings via such avenues such as joint procurement and sharing of services within the new councils. Functions such as sharing of IT and payroll systems are examples of local government functions that could also benefit from being shared within the various councils. With an ever increasing strain in the amount of available public funding available, the opportunities for improvement in service delivery associated with the new

councils merge will become increasingly more important. Provision also needs to be made for cross-border co-operation and possible sharing of services between councils both in the North and South of Ireland.

We believe that delivery models for the new councils should be designed in such a way that would not only allow for transformation of existing services within councils and also would allow for collaborative solutions being made between councils themselves. Preferred models should be equality proofed, based on models of best practice, provide for maximum efficiency savings and collaboration. Sinn Fein also recognises that despite the tight RPA timeframe for the designing of such delivery options, every effort should be made to have this completed by 2011 and not done in a stop-start, piecemeal fashion afterwards.

The range of additional services, both in-house and shared services that will be delivered by local government post RPA, will undoubtedly necessitate for a strong interface, communication and lobbying provision between local government and the various central governmental departments. Currently NILGA acts as this conduit between the two sectors. We would see the requirement for some form of local governmental association, along the lines of a possible re-designed NILGA as fulfilling this role. The membership of such an LGA model should be based on party political strength and would require it being given a strong representative role in representing the local government sector. Sinn Fein would welcome further exploration on this issue.