

Reflections on consultation responses

The Economic Appraisal (Release Version 1.0) sought to identify the optimum strategic direction of travel for Local Government in Northern Ireland through the RPA reform process. There has been significant positive engagement by the sector and 'Transformation with Collaboration' was accepted by the vast majority of respondents as the preferred strategic direction of travel for local government although a number of thematic issues were raised.

Thematic Issues

The following thematic issues emerged from the consultation process:

- i. What is the most appropriate approach to collaboration?
- ii. How will a single Waste Disposal Authority add value?
- iii. Does the sector have the capacity to deliver this change?
- iv. How much will the change cost and how much benefit will it deliver?
- v. How will the change be paid for?

While it was generally agreed that Transformation with Collaboration was the optimum strategic way forward for local government, a number of valid and robust challenges were raised that need to be addressed within the detailed design phase. For example, the need for a flexible approach to collaboration was emphasised.

Why have these thematic issues arisen?

Our perception as to why these thematic issues have emerged is as follows:

- i. The vision for the Business Services Organisation;
- ii. Confidence that accountability can be properly maintained if services are delivered in new and different ways;
- iii. Confidence in shared service solutions;
- iv. Willingness to "truly" collaborate;
- v. Need for certainty;
- vi. Transparency of process;
- vii. Accountability for delivery; and
- viii. Acceptance of an agreed operational vision for Local Government.

In our opinion these 'causal' reasons individually and collectively explain why the thematic issues above have been raised during the consultation process. In addition to addressing the individual issues raised through the consultation process, it is these underlying "causes" which need to be identified and mitigated against e.g. providing increased transparency through broader sector involvement across future programme structures, plans and processes.

What are the implications for the recommendations in the Economic Appraisal (Release Version 1.0)?

A number of areas were properly highlighted for further consideration within the detailed design phase, including the design of collaborative solutions and the level of projected costs and benefits associated with the reform programme. The highlighting of these areas is part of the normal iteration of ideas, concepts and suggestions within a strategic change process and should all be welcomed as constructive interventions in the context of an overall collaborative approach.

'Transformation with Collaboration' remains as the preferred option even when a further sensitivity analysis is conducted in line with the issues raised by ALGFO. There is a need to accept both the normality of this type and level of feedback and to recognise the potential scale of the nugatory effort that could be required to develop further iterations of the Economic Appraisal without changing the basic conclusion – Transformation with Collaboration is the optimum way forward for Local Government in Northern Ireland.

The key challenge for the design phase is to build on this positive engagement across the sector and ensure that all of the concerns and suggestions are reflected in the detailed design of solutions. There is a need to maintain the momentum and level of engagement that the Economic Appraisal has created around the reform agenda.