

Briefing on

Improvement Service

Public Service Reform

Introduction

The Improvement Service (IS) was set up by the previous Executive as part of their plans to “transform public services”. It was established as a partnership between the Executive, COSLA and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) to “meet a need for advice, consultancy and programme support” to deliver improvements in local government services. The new Scottish Government left Improvement Scotland and the two remaining partners have been joined by 31 of the 32 local authorities. The organisation is funded by top slicing the local government budget and specific grants from the Scottish Government. Total funding this year is £3,270,000.

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UNISON Concerns

UNISON is interested in the work of any organisation that is driving change in the public sector. Sadly the Improvement Service, despite being entirely funded by public money, is not subject to Freedom of Information legislation.

UNISON was particularly concerned about the amount of the service’s budget being spent on private consultants. These organisations tend to offer the same old tired solutions of privatisation and shared services. Following an FOI to the Scottish Government IS did provide us with some information on their use of

consultants. Other figures come from their annual reports.

Consultancy and Contractor costs

07/08	08/09	09/10
£2,186,009	£642,864	£188,411

UNISON welcomes the reduction in consultant spend as more staff have been directly employed and local authority staff are working on projects with IS (reduced from 43% of spending in 07/08 to 10% 09/10). However it is still difficult to get information about what these projects are and what private sector involvement there is in the future development of our public services.

Consultants Used

IS have used a wide range of consultants. While they have provided us with a list of these organisations and fees there is no detail on the work done. IS state that they have continued to use external contractors for the national recruitment portal, the public notices portal and the Planning Development Programme, which supports training and development of officers and elected members with planning responsibility. Consultants listed

include **Stepstone**: paid £666,069 in 2007/8. They work in Human Capital Management software. **TPS Planning** have been working with IS for at least three years earning approximately £150,000. TPS offer a “unique” service specialising in planning public affairs education and economic development. **Kynesis** who have been paid over £40,000 for work to orchestrate organisational change.

Scottish Government funding

Because IS did not respond to an earlier request for information UNISON placed an FOI request with Scottish Government and the local authorities to find out more about the work of the Improvement Service. The Government now provides funds only for specific projects: 2007/8 project funds totalled £3.9m, 2008/9 £1.2m and up to £1.4m this year. The main project appears to be Customer First. This projects aims to use new technology and service redesign to improve authorities' responses to enquiries from the public. Funding has also been given directly to local

authorities who are leading on specific projects. A breakdown of this funding is not yet available but up to £4.7 million could be given out this year. (This includes the purchase of goods and services as part of Customer First) The Scottish Government only holds information on the use of consultants by IS on the Planning Development Programme. In 2007/8 the total grant was £749k and £563k went on consultants and in 2008/9. The total grant £373k, with £238k on consultants. There was no information on which the consultants are/were.

Further
Information

**Improvement
Service Website**
<http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/>

**IS operational
plan and budget**
<http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/library/view-document/2547-improvement-service-operational-plan-budget-2009-10/?format=raw&tmpl=component>

**IS Annual
Report**

<http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/library/view-document/2832-improvement-service-annual-report-2008-09/?format=raw&tmpl=component>

P and I Briefing
on Arbutnott
Review
<http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/briefings/217/Arbutnottsharedservices.pdf>

Local Authorities

The request to councils provided information on projects but little on the role of consultants.

East Dunbartonshire: 0.25 of a member of staff working on the Citizen's Account project. **East Lothian** No staff seconded but 2 members of staff are delivering training for IS as part of the Elected Members CPD scheme. The Head of Governance and Performance Management at ELC has been supporting the NEC project Board. **Fife:** One member of staff: seconded to IS: a Senior Project Manager working on the "organisational development portfolio" in particular on expanding partnership working and collaborative learning development opportunities between councils, other public sector organisations and relevant stakeholders. **Glasgow:** the reply states that a number of staff are working with IS but they cannot give

any details as this information is not "held" anywhere. **North Ayrshire:** customer service team is working with IS to provide a bank of questions for all councils to use for customer satisfaction as part of Customer First. **North Lanarkshire:** One employee on secondment as IT manager at 'Scottish Office' as part of programme of using IT for 'joined up care'. Another is working with IS on workforce planning. **Perth and Kinross:** 7 staff on part time or ad hoc basis: working with SPIDER on the Public Information Notices portal. **South Lanarkshire:** 3 employees on Customer First, 2 on the Cost Architecture project, 2 on Lean Thinking plant cost and 1 on public sector improvement framework working group on equalities. A separate FOI regarding the money paid to KPMG revealed a total from local government of £5.9m.

Action for branches

Organisations like the Improvement Service are designing the future shape of our services. Branches are encouraged to keep up to date with the work of IS in their areas and the use of management consultants to ensure we can respond effectively to any plans.

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