

## Executive Summary

In two-tier parts of England, trading standards and fire safety services are delivered at county level, while environmental health and the majority of licensing services (with some exceptions) are delivered at district level. This presents some particular challenges in relation to the management of a coordinated and customer-focused approach to the delivery of regulatory services.

The creation of the nine new unitary authorities in 2009 therefore presented a unique opportunity in terms of rethinking the way that services are provided. Each began a journey of transition and improvement, with LBRO helping them along the way.

This document outlines the learning so far on the basis of the feedback from the authorities themselves, and has relevance to local authority regulatory services as a whole.

## New Unitaries

- ❖ Bedford
- ❖ Central Bedfordshire
- ❖ Cornwall
- ❖ Cheshire East
- ❖ Cheshire West and Chester
- ❖ Durham
- ❖ Northumberland
- ❖ Shropshire
- ❖ Wiltshire

## Learning the Lessons

### **Project management and planning – strategic level**

There were some issues relating to project management and planning all authorities found difficult to resolve. There is clearly a balance to be struck between adopting an overly centralised approach and allowing individual services to resolve technical issues themselves. The most effective arrangements were those that ensured there was sufficient leadership and direction from the centre, while not constraining individual services from troubleshooting their own problems.

### **Project management and planning – operational level**

The challenge of undertaking the day job as well as working on Local Government Review was a key issue for all authorities. A critical success factor was ensuring that those charged with setting up the new arrangements had time and space to dedicate to this activity.

Some authorities created capacity by working together in advance, with the savings made through joint management redeployed into project management. Time was also freed by drawing on existing liaison groups between environmental health and trading standards. Groups that had been working on service planning were used to prepare transitional arrangements. This enabled staff to become involved and gained buy-in.

Another means to create capacity was to release senior staff to work solely on developing the new arrangements, 'back-filling' their roles with other staff to ensure that day-to-day management considerations were still addressed. Certainly, there is evidence that those authorities who required their managers to work on the reorganisation process while still managing their existing service area found it harder to make progress.

### **Human Resources and key appointments**

Where Heads of Regulatory Service were appointed late, this appears to have had the biggest impact. Some authorities attempted to drive change through working groups and project teams, but without a Head of Regulatory Service having clear responsibility for the new service, progress was always harder to make.

An additional HR issue related to skill sets, given that much larger structures for the delivery of regulatory services were being created. Often, managers may have been responsible for relatively small, technical groups of staff. There is a significant change in the skills required to lead and manage a much larger group of staff. In addition, most newly appointed managers came from the pre-existing district or county councils. This meant that their experience was often limited to a single regulatory service area. Their new roles required them to manage across a much broader range of activities.

### **Culture**

The new unitary authorities needed to overcome the challenge of bringing together different cultures. In relation to regulatory services, this involved the integration of environmental health and trading standards services, each with a long history of independent operation and a perceived culture. One matter the authorities have had to address is how the delivery of regulatory services is seen as seamless by the public.

### **Transformational or transitional services**

The original designs submitted as part of the unitary bid process appear to have rarely been followed – indeed most actually started again. The bid was usually transformational in nature, whereas all the key issues that required addressing in the run up to vesting day were transitional.

Many working on the practical arrangements for the delivery of regulatory services found that their initial enthusiasm to realise the modernisation ideals set out in their authority's bid was overtaken by the simple practical need to ensure that key services were effectively delivered on day one.

In terms of creating new management structures to bring together regulatory services, the authorities faced some difficult choices. Firstly, the easiest way to bring staff together and ensure readiness on day one was to create a structure that mirrored what already existed, thus avoiding any form of service integration or modernisation. Transitional structures typically kept environmental health, trading standards and licensing services intact, albeit perhaps in a new department of 'regulatory services'. While these arrangements might be the simplest means of ensuring continuity, they are unlikely to transform and modernise the delivery of regulatory services. A critical success factor appears to be to ensure that any transitional arrangements retain the flexibility to allow a more radical transformation of services at a later time.

## **Communication and consultation**

Every authority started from the position of wishing to be as open and transparent as circumstances would allow. Many set up regular briefing sessions and used the web and other forms of communication. However, the issue of most concern to staff was inevitably their own positions, leading to periods of great uncertainty. Indeed, as much as senior managers responsible for transformation may wish to communicate with staff, this is not always possible as confidential issues became involved.

Authorities that developed a communications strategy at the outset seemed best able to manage the process with the least concerns for staff. One particular element to this was ensuring that staff received consistent messages to consistent timetables.

## **Access to best practice**

There was a feeling amongst some authorities that there was insufficient access to learning and best practice from elsewhere. As a result, LBRO and the new unitary authorities themselves decided to work together. The group 'Unitary Pioneers' was born.

## **Conclusion**

This project is proving an excellent practical example of partnership working between LBRO and an important group of local authorities. The anticipated outcomes of the work will go a long way towards embedding the Hampton principles and better regulation principles within these authorities. The full text of the report and case studies from the authorities should give a more detailed flavour of experiences of the individual authorities.

Key success factors include:

1. Give appropriate managers the time and space they need to set up the new arrangements.
2. Provide central leadership, whilst allowing individual services to tackle their own problems.
3. Appoint the senior manager with clear responsibility for the new service as early as possible.
4. Provide all managers with the training they need to lead and deliver a new service.
5. Ensure that any early changes are flexible enough to allow for more radical transformation of services later on.
6. Develop a communications strategy from the outset that ensures staff receive consistent messages to consistent timetables.
7. Draw on existing and emerging best practice elsewhere.
8. Acknowledge staff will come from different cultures and involve them in creating new ones.
9. Try to keep delivery as seamless as possible for the public – and talk to them when you can't.
10. Remember you are not alone – find and talk to your peers who are going through the same thing.

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