

Committee for the Scrutiny of the First Minister

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WRITTEN EVIDENCE TO THE COMMITTEE FOR THE SCRUTINY OF THE FIRST MINISTER: THE ROLE OF THE DELIVERY UNIT

Introduction

1. This paper is intended as written evidence to inform the Committee for the Scrutiny of the First Minister on the role of the First Minister's Delivery Unit.

The role of the Delivery Unit

2. The Delivery Unit was established on 1 September 2011, to sit at the heart of the Welsh Government to focus on the Government's core agenda and to ensure integrated and streamlined delivery of its strategic priorities - supporting the organisation to deliver to the required level and satisfaction of Ministers.

3. The Delivery Unit is a small team, comprising 6 members, reporting to a Deputy Director. It is staffed by existing civil servants brought in from other parts of the organisation. Each member of the Delivery Unit has responsibility for a particular area of policy e.g. one member of the Unit will be responsible for providing independent briefing on the Local Government and Communities portfolio area. They provide me with early warning of potential difficulties that warrant the attention of Ministers. The Unit was not established to do other people's jobs for them or to deliver the policies and outcomes themselves; rather it is there to help Departments to deliver - helping people to affect a greater pace of change.

4. The Unit is an internal process that I put in place to enable me to monitor delivery as part of the machinery of government. It is primarily an inward facing unit intended to add value and rigour and the Unit reports directly on the progress and effectiveness of each department towards delivering the government's priorities. It advises me on the policies being formulated as part of the programme for government to assure me that they are being planned and implemented in the best way.

5. The main thrust of the Delivery Unit is to influence behaviours behind the scenes, helping to design new and more effective approaches to the delivery of the government's key objectives. The role of the Unit is to identify levers for change; challenge and test the robustness and delivery of key activities; identify opportunities to align policy programmes in order to deliver greater and more effective outcomes and to provide constructive challenge to policy ideas and processes and where necessary an alternative perspective for officials to consider when taking forward their work. It does not micro-manage or create a bureaucratic process which hampers departments' efforts to deliver.

The Delivery Unit's operating methods

6. The unit gathers the necessary information that is required to effectively monitor the Programme for Government. In order to advise me each member of the Delivery Unit must be fully familiar with the policies, programmes, and sensitivities and potential and/or actual issues relating to the portfolio area they are covering.

7. Delivery Unit members have access to briefings and documents relevant to their area of responsibility. The Unit's members sit on programme boards and steering groups and engage with officials on key elements of the various departmental strategies. They meet regularly with the Departmental Senior Management teams and have access to all submissions and papers for Ministerial policy boards and internal policy boards. In these meetings they provide constructive challenge to policy ideas and processes, and offer advice for officials to consider when taking forward their work, helping to explore the full range of policy options that ought to be considered in order to deliver the best policy outcomes in the relevant policy area.

8. The Unit provides me with a candid view of how policies are being taken forward, It briefs me on progress of key deliverables, as well as identifying immediate issues that warrant my attention. It also informs my bi-monthly delivery bi-laterals with Ministers and their Directors' General. The briefing reports are intended to open a dialogue about performance between me, Ministers and their senior civil servants.

9. The briefings are based on the author's assessment of the progress and performance of Departments towards delivering the Programme for Government to ensure policies remain consistent with Ministerial priorities. This analysis will typically identify the current issues and any potential concerns for my attention.

10. Where the Unit has identified a potential delivery risk or where an issue is negatively impacting on delivery they will speak in the first instance to the relevant senior official so that timely and appropriate action can be taken. If the department fails to act or respond to this early intervention, they will escalate their concerns to me.

The performance and effectiveness of the Delivery Unit

11. I believe that the Unit has developed a balanced perspective of the organisation and is able to identify practices or behaviours which could be potential barriers to the delivery of our core priorities. It is working alongside departments identifying risks to the delivery of our key manifesto commitments and to ensure that delivery matches expectations.

12. The Unit has encouraged officials to readjust their thinking to suit changing needs, circumstances and priorities e.g. in light of economic uncertainty or societal change. It has sought to encourage those parts of the organisation that are not fully joined-up to make the connections and to see the full integration of our policies; breaking down perceived barriers to achieve outcomes in the most cost-effective way and to adopt a results-based approach to the development of policies.

13. It has considered and offered challenge to resource allocation and workforce planning within DG areas and also whether we have the people with the right skills in certain areas. It has sought to challenge bureaucracy to ensure that our processes are not getting in the way of delivery.

14. We have good working relationships across the Civil Service. On the ground, teams are open to engagement and have been frank about the delivery challenges they face, including where those are corporately and/or politically created. They have been open in meetings about their work concerns, where they think improvements could be made and have flagged up areas where cross departmental working could be improved. The Unit has helped to test whether our core policies are sufficiently robust and/or responsive to meet the new emerging challenges and have helped to develop a shared understanding of what we want to deliver and what the outcome should be.

Conclusion

15. The First Minister's Delivery Unit was established to provide me with an independent assessment of each portfolio area so that I can personally monitor the Programme for Government; allowing assumptions to be challenged and pertinent issues to be raised in order to test whether the Government's policies are sufficiently robust and/or responsive to meet the new emerging challenges in light of the economic climate and reduced resources.

16. The Unit has provided me with an impartial and fair perspective of departments. It has given me a private discussion space and has provided me with free and frank opinion, advice and information to enable me to monitor progress and hold Ministers and their Departments to account. The Unit has brought a fresh perspective and works constructively with colleagues to influence behind the scenes. I believe that it will not be possible to determine what impact the Delivery Unit has had on the organisation until the end of this Assembly term when it can be judged by wider outcomes across the medium term.

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First Minister for Wales