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# Financial Scrutiny Unit Briefing

## **The Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services**

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The report of the Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services (also known as the Christie Commission after its chair, Dr Campbell Christie CBE) was published on 29 June 2011.

This briefing provides background to the establishment of the Commission, a summary of its main conclusions and recommendations, and outlines some initial reaction to the report.



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The report of the Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services was published on 29 June 2011.

The UK Government's 2010 Spending Review set out spending allocations for the Scottish Government until financial year 2014-15. However, in November 2010, the Scottish Government proposed firm spending plans for 2011-12 only and launched the Commission to provide "recommendations about how public services must change to meet the medium and long-term financial challenges and the expectations of the people of Scotland".

The Commission was chaired by Dr Campbell Christie CBE, former General Secretary of the STUC. Dr Christie was joined by nine other members with a range of experience across various different sectors including local government, the voluntary sector, the private sector, the media, academia and the trade unions.

The report sets out in detail what it sees as the scale of the challenge facing public services in Scotland. However, while it is clear that the current public spending reductions were the impetus behind the Commission's establishment, the Commission states that the issues it seeks to address "also reflect long-standing needs in Scottish society as well as new demands, particularly from demographic change". The report concludes that the need for reform is now "urgent".

The Commission identifies four key objectives for the programme of reform. These are that:

- public services are built around people and communities, their needs, aspirations, capacities and skills, and work to build up their autonomy and resilience;
- public service organisations work together effectively to achieve outcomes;
- public service organisations prioritise prevention, reducing inequalities and promoting equality; and
- all public services constantly seek to improve performance and reduce costs, and are open, transparent and accountable.

Although it identifies a number of broad priorities and includes some recommendations for change, the Commission's report does not, in the main, offer specific recommendations to the Government on how to progress the proposed programme of reform. Instead, the report concludes by calling on the Government to provide political leadership in taking its proposals forward.

Initial reaction to the report has been mixed. Although there has not been formal parliamentary consideration of its conclusions and recommendations, the Scottish Government and political parties have generally welcomed the report. Certain public and voluntary sector bodies have also been positive, particularly COSLA, who have already moved to act on some of the Commission's recommendations. Reaction in the media has been different, and although there has been some positive comment, criticism has been made of the report's lack of concrete proposals.

## ESTABLISHMENT OF THE COMMISSION

The UK Government published its [Spending Review](#) (HM Treasury 2010) in October 2010, which included spending allocations for the Scottish Government until financial year 2014-15. However, in [Scotland's Spending Plans and Draft Budget 2011-12](#) (Scottish Government 2010a), the Scottish Government chose to set out firm plans for financial year 2011-12 only (although ["indicative" figures were provided to the Parliament](#) prior to the Stage 1 debate on the Budget Bill 2011) (Scottish Government 2011a).

Rather than set out firm plans for the remaining years of the Spending Review, John Swinney MSP, then Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth, announced the establishment of a Commission on the future delivery of public services, independent of the Scottish Government. In his statement to the Parliament upon the publication of Scotland's Spending Plans and Draft Budget 2011-12, the Cabinet Secretary commented on the role of the Commission:

"the commission will be charged with providing recommendations about how public services must change to meet the medium and long-term financial challenges and the expectations of the people of Scotland. Despite the challenges, we remain ambitious for Scotland's public services, and the commission will advise on how best to deliver excellent, sustainable services for our communities in the future. The commission will report next summer to inform spending plans for the period 2012-13 to 2014-15." (Scottish Parliament 2010)

Alex Salmond MSP, the First Minister, formally launched the Commission on 19 November 2010 and made these comments on its role:

"The Budget announced by the Scottish Government earlier this week, addresses a financial challenge without precedent since devolution. The £1.3 billion cut in funds next year marks the beginning of the biggest reduction in public spending imposed on Scotland by any UK government.

Despite the severity and scale of these cuts, we remain ambitious for Scotland's public services. This Government is determined to ensure these services to which we all hold so dear, continue to be delivered in a manner that keeps the social fabric of Scotland intact. The Commission will therefore examine various options for reform whilst retaining the social democratic ethos of our public service delivery in Scotland." (Scottish Government 2010b)

However, at the time of the Commission's establishment, other political parties were critical of the Government's decision to only produce a one-year budget. Andy Kerr MSP, then Labour Finance spokesman stated:

"Every budget is a test for the cabinet secretary and for the Government. This is a defining moment for the Parliament because of the challenge that our economy faces, because we need to tackle the plague of youth unemployment and because we need to put fairness and economic growth at the heart of the budget.

The Government has failed. It has put party before nation, it has put self-interest before public interest and it has put the finance secretary's job before the jobs of the people of Scotland, whom he is supposed to serve. He is not running a country; he is running an election campaign." (Scottish Parliament 2010)

## REMIT AND MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMISSION

Dr Campbell Christie CBE, former General Secretary of the Scottish Trades Union Congress, accepted the role of Chair of the Commission and was joined by nine other members with a range of experience across various different sectors including local government, the voluntary sector, the private sector, the media, academia and the trade unions. The Commission was assisted by three expert advisers, and was supported by a small secretariat team seconded from the Scottish Government. See [Annex A of this briefing](#) for full details of the Commission's membership.

In the Commission's remit (see [Annex B of this briefing](#) for the full remit), the Scottish Government set out its vision for the public services of the future. The Commission was asked to identify the opportunities and obstacles that will help or hinder progress towards this vision, and to make recommendations for change.

More specifically, the remit asked the Commission to:

- address the role of public services in improving outcomes, what impact they make, and whether this can be done more effectively;
- examine structures, functions and roles, to improve the quality of public service delivery and reduce demand through, for example, early intervention; and
- consider the role of a public service ethos, along with cultural change, engaging public sector workers, users and stakeholders.

## THE WORK OF THE COMMISSION

The Commission issued a [call for evidence](#) in December 2010, asking for views on:

- experiences of the operation of public services;
- examples of projects, services, innovations or improvement work, including evaluations or assessments, which may be relevant to the work of the Commission;
- the obstacles to and opportunities for improvement; and
- the options for the future.

More than 200 responses were received from various organisations and individuals including public bodies, voluntary organisations and private sector companies. Responses can be found on the [Commission's website](#).

In addition, the Commission conducted a large number of discussion events and bilateral meetings with organisations and individuals across Scotland and across different sectors. These included political parties, local government, voluntary and private sector organisations and users of public services. Notes from the discussion events can also be found on the [Commission's website](#).

The Commission met formally on ten occasions to consider the evidence received and formulate its report, which was published on 29 June 2011.

# THE COMMISSION'S REPORT

## OVERALL APPROACH

The Commission sets out its view on the aims of its work in the introduction to [the report](#):

“The recommendations we make will contribute principally towards the better sustainability of public services over the medium to long term. However, their prompt implementation would help to improve services and deliver cost savings in the short term, thereby alleviating some part of the current financial pressure on public services.”  
(Christie 2011)

The Commission's report begins by assessing the scale of the challenge facing public services in Scotland (Chapter 2) and then proposes an “urgent, sustained and coherent programme of public service reform” (Chapter 3). The bulk of the report discusses what the Commission describes as the “four key objectives which must shape a programme of reform” (Chapters 4-7).

Finally, the report “summarises the key elements of the programme of reform which should be taken forward, including a set of criteria against which any specific proposals for the reform of public services should be assessed” (Chapter 8).

The Commission uses both specific evidence and examples of good practice in addition to wider evidence-taking and other related reports and publications (see the [section of this briefing on the wider public reform agenda](#)). The report contains some specific recommendations for action but in the most part maps out a general way forward for public services.

The following sections of this briefing first outline the Commission's view of the scale of the challenge and its rationale for reform, then sets out some key priorities identified by the Commission and its specific recommendations.

## THE NEED FOR REFORM

As set out in a variety of reports including the Scottish Government's Chief Economic Adviser's report, [Outlook for Scottish Government Expenditure](#) (Goudie 2010), and reports from [Audit Scotland](#) (Audit Scotland 2009) and the [Independent Budget Review](#) (Beveridge et al 2010), the outlook for public spending in Scotland is challenging in both the immediate future and over the medium to long term. The Chief Economic Adviser states that spending in real terms is not expected to return to 2009-10 levels until 2025-26. While it is clear that the public spending reductions resulting from the UK Government's spending review were the impetus for the Commission's establishment, in its report the Commission (Christie 2011) notes that:

“It is important to recognise that the underlying financial challenges facing the future delivery of public services are not solely, or even principally, a consequence of the current budgetary situation. They also reflect long-standing needs in Scottish society as well as new demands, particularly from demographic change.”

The report is also critical of successive Scottish Administrations' attempts to tackle these long-standing social problems, stating that:

“Despite a series of Scottish Government initiatives and significant growth in public spending since devolution, on most key measures social and economic inequalities have remained unchanged or become more pronounced. The evidence submitted to us demonstrated that these inequalities account for a significant element of the increasing demands on our public services.”

In addition, the Commission identifies serious shortcomings in the capacity of public services to deal with Scotland's social problems. The Commission states that public services:

- are often fragmented, complex and opaque, which hinders essential joint working between services;
- are on the whole "top down" and not responsive to the needs of individuals and communities;
- lack accountability, and the system is often focussed on short-term measures.

On this basis, the Commission concludes that:

"The need for reform is now urgent. If it is not substantially achieved in this Parliament, the chance to fashion an effective, sustainable and valued form of delivering public services for the future may be lost. We cannot allow the obstacles that have hampered reform in the past to thwart the action that is now required."

## **PRIORITIES FOR PUBLIC SERVICES**

As noted above, the Commission identifies four key objectives for the programme of reform, based on the problems identified. These are that:

- public services are built around people and communities, their needs, aspirations, capacities and skills, and work to build up their autonomy and resilience;
- public service organisations work together effectively to achieve outcomes;
- public service organisations prioritise prevention, reducing inequalities and promoting equality; and
- all public services constantly seek to improve performance and reduce costs, and are open, transparent and accountable.

The Commission then identifies a number of broad priorities to achieve these objectives. Some of the key priorities include:

- Recognising that effective services must be designed with and for people and communities - not delivered 'top down' for administrative convenience;
- Maximising scarce resources by utilising all available resources from the public, private and third sectors, individuals, groups and communities;
- Working closely with individuals and communities to understand their needs, maximise talents and resources, support self reliance, and build resilience;
- Concentrating the efforts of all services on delivering integrated services that deliver results;
- Prioritising preventative measures to reduce demand and lessen inequalities;
- Identifying and targeting the underlying causes of inter-generational deprivation and low aspiration;

- Tightening oversight and accountability of public services, introducing consistent data-gathering and performance comparators, to improve services;
- Driving continuing reform across all public services based on outcomes, improved performance and cost reduction; and
- Implementing better long-term strategic planning, including greater transparency around major budget decisions like universal entitlements.

## **SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS**

In addition to the broad priorities for reforming public services, the Commission proposes a number of specific recommendations. These include:

- Introducing a new set of statutory powers and duties, common to all public service bodies, focussed on improving outcomes. These new duties should include a presumption in favour of preventative action and tackling inequalities;
- Making provision in the proposed Community Empowerment and Renewal Bill to embed community participation in the design and delivery of services;
- Forging a new concordat between the Scottish Government and local government to develop joined-up services, backed by funding arrangements requiring integrated provision;
- Implementing new inter-agency training to reduce silo mentalities, drive forward service integration and build a common public service ethos;
- Devolving competence for job search and support to the Scottish Parliament to achieve the integration of service provision in the area of employability;
- Giving Audit Scotland a stronger remit to improve performance and reduce costs across all public service organizations, with a particular emphasis on scrutiny of financial information, performance and outcomes;
- Merging the functions of the Auditor General and the Accounts Commission;
- Applying commissioning and procurement standards consistently and transparently to achieve competitive neutrality between suppliers of public services; and
- Reviewing specific public services in terms of the difference they make to people's lives, in line with the reform criteria we set out.

Despite the broad principles and recommendations identified above, the report does not in the main, as might have been expected following the Commission's launch, offer specific recommendations to the Government on how to progress the proposed programme of reform.

Instead, the report concludes by calling on the Government to provide political leadership in taking its proposals forward. In his foreword to the report, Campbell Christie states that:

“Ultimate responsibility for reform rests, however, with the Scottish Government. I urge them to act quickly and decisively - as a society we no longer have time for delay. I believe the way forward is clear, and it is now essential that the Scottish Government exercises its leadership by initiating a fundamental public service reform process.”



## REACTION TO THE REPORT

The Commission's report was only published recently, and there was no formal parliamentary consideration of its conclusions and recommendations prior to the summer recess, although the Session 3 Local Government and Communities Committee held an evidence session with the Commission on 9 February 2011. Politicians and others have offered some initial comment.

### POLITICAL REACTION

In its [news release](#) (Scottish Government 2011b) issued on the day of the report's publication, John Swinney MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth stated that:

"We are determined to go further delivering an ambitious reform programme, which puts citizens and communities at the centre.

That is why the Christie Commission's report is both timely and important. It recognises that much has been done, but rightly argues that further fundamental reforms must now be considered and urgently progressed.

We recognise that a co-ordinated view needs to be taken across Government. The Cabinet Sub Committee on public service reform will meet for the first time today to shape and take forward our plans."

During an interview on Newsnight Scotland on 29 June (BBC 2011), Mr Swinney stated that, in his view, the report does not "open a new direction of travel" and that its programme of reform was "broadly the direction the Government is going in".

Richard Baker MSP, Scottish Labour's finance spokesperson, [welcomed the report](#), especially its focus on preventative measures, and stated that "the Scottish Government is now duty-bound to come back with an action plan of how to make the changes needed but also a timetable for that change." (Scottish Labour 2011)

Gavin Brown MSP, for the Scottish Conservatives, [also welcomed](#) the focus on prevention, but noted that "the Commission were critical of the fact that, despite massive financial increases since devolution, most key measures of social and economic inequality have remained unchanged." (Scottish Conservatives 2011)

### PUBLIC AND VOLUNTARY SECTOR REACTION

Across public sector organisations, most reaction welcomed the preventative approach set out in the report and the need for more effective collaborative working.

[COSLA reacted very positively](#) to the report (COSLA 2011), and stated that:

"COSLA supports this report to such an extent that we will not be waiting for a Government response instead we will be moving forward immediately to do what we can at our own hand to act in the way that the Commission suggests.

- We will strengthen Community Planning and make it more accessible to communities.
- We will focus more of our spend on early intervention rather than solving problems that have already occurred.

- We will continue with the sectoral reform that we have started and
- We will benchmark improved performance to ensure best practise is shared.

There are many other things we can do and these will be taken up by COSLA's Leadership."

The [Association of Directors of Social Work](#) (Herald 2011) also welcomed the preventative approach and stated:

"The wisdom of the Christie Commission's approach is that they haven't tried to come up with a one-size-fits-all model – a quick restructuring exercise won't sort it all. We want to see a framework within which local partnerships can deliver the integration the Government wants to see. What will work in Inverness won't work in Inverclyde and Dr Christie's report gives strength to that approach."

The [Scottish Community Alliance](#) (Herald 2011) welcomed the Commission's "support for people power and preventative spend" but noted that:

"the commission's support for community planning is not reflected in the experience of the community sector in Scotland. We would look for power and influence for community anchor organisations at neighbourhood level.

"Vested interests and budget constraints will try to frustrate this agenda. However with diminishing public expenditure we need to utilise all available resources, including the untapped energies and enthusiasm of Scotland's communities to make real progress."

The [Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations](#) (Herald 2011) also generally welcomed the report's broad thrust but warned that:

"Unless John Swinney switches emphasis towards prevention and recognises that the third sector should be doing more, things won't change. I think the Cabinet Secretary knows that.

Some people say the report doesn't tell us anything we didn't know already, but it crystallises the issues in a useful way."

## **MEDIA AND COMMENTATOR REACTION**

The report was widely covered in both print and television media in the days following its publication. Overall reaction was mixed, and although the report's perceived omissions and flaws were pointed out, there was some support for the direction of travel it recommends.

In its [leader](#) of 29 June (Scotsman 2011), although it noted support for the Commission's "call for the break-up of the bureaucratic empires governing health and social care", the Scotsman newspaper's view was that:

"Unstated but obvious was the convenient fact the group would not report until after Scotland had elected a new parliament. Today the commission finally publishes its report and, after reading its more than 100 pages, many will wonder why it was delayed until after the election, for it does not set out in any clear detail what a modern Scottish public sector should look like.

It is, to put this gently, rather high on jargon and low on firm proposals. With apologies to Armando Iannucci (unless the renowned Scottish satirist who gave us *In The Thick Of It* was secretly the author), we quote from its conclusion: "The goal must be nothing less

than a substantial transformation of our public services. The prize is a sustainable, person-centred, system, achieving outcomes for every citizen and every community." There is no mention of "person-centred" motherhood and apple pie."

[Brian Taylor](#), political editor of BBC Scotland stated that:

"It would be easy - very easy - to be sceptical, indeed, cynical about the outcome of the Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services, chaired by Campbell Christie.

They have nothing to say on pending job cuts in the public sector. They have very little to say, other than very general approval, on current proposals for restructuring, such as in the police and fire services.

In that sense, one might question what they bring to the table when John Swinney begins the process of formulating his next budget." (Taylor 2011)

[Paul Brewer](#), head of Government at PWC Scotland, wrote in Public Finance magazine that:

"While the Christie Commission report provides a road map for long-term culture change in the public sector, it has fallen short of delivering the detail needed on how to achieve it. Despite the lack of a check-list, everyone will be hoping that it will provide a much-awaited catalyst for bold and radical change, galvanising the public sector in to delivering the transformation required to address the unprecedented challenges arising from the spending cuts." (Brewer 2011)

[Martin Sime](#) of SCVO, who acted as one of the Commission's expert advisers, wrote in the Scotsman that:

"Yesterday's launch of the Christie Commission report into the future delivery of public services left many frustrated. It failed to deliver a magic wand to fix our public services. There was no soundbite, no simple headline recommendation that would be straightforward to implement.

But what Christie does do is provide a framework and a set of actions which could genuinely transform the way we think about, deliver and pay for Scotland's public services. It makes it clear that there can be no more excuses - that we must change the way public services meet the needs of Scotland's people and we must start changing now." (Sime 2011)

## **WIDER PUBLIC SERVICE REFORM AGENDA**

As the Commission outlines in its report, many of the issues it raises are not new, and a range of reports have been published in recent years that cover much of the same territory. The Commission lists a number of these documents and initiatives in [Annex A of its report](#):

- the Independent Budget Review;
- work to pursue the integration of health and social care;
- the Scottish Government's consultation on the future of policing;
- the Scottish Government's consultation on the future of fire and rescue services;
- the Clyde Valley Review on shared services;

- the Deacon Report: Joining the dots: A better start for Scotland's children;
- the McClelland Review of ICT Infrastructure in the Public Sector in Scotland; and
- the Roe Review of 16-18 vocational education and training.

In addition, the Session 3 Finance Committee published two relevant reports, first on the [2010 Budget Strategy Phase of the budget process](#) (Scottish Parliament Finance Committee 2010), which took the form of an inquiry into the efficient delivery of public services. Then building on this work, the Committee produced a [more detailed, focused report on preventative spending](#) (Scottish Parliament Finance Committee 2011).

## **NEXT STEPS**

As stated in the introductory section of this briefing, the Commission's report was originally intended to inform the forthcoming 2011 Scottish Spending Review, which under the Agreement between the Finance Committee and the Scottish Government, needs to be published by 20 September. However, given the longer term and more broad-brush focus of the report, and as commentators have stated, it is difficult to see where the report will have an impact on the immediate spending decisions of the Government.

Upon the report's publication, the Government announced that it would consider its conclusions and recommendations in detail over the summer, and that a public service reform Cabinet sub-committee had already been established to consider the Government's response.

The Session 4 Finance Committee has already agreed to continue focusing on the preventative spending agenda promoted by its predecessor, and has announced that it will be focusing its budget scrutiny on this topic. The Committee has issued a [call for evidence](#) (Scottish Parliament Finance Committee 2011b), including a specific, targeted questionnaire to Community Planning Partnerships.

## ANNEX A: MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMISSION

The membership of the Commission was as follows:

- **Dr Campbell Christie CBE**, Former General Secretary of the STUC, President of Scottish Council for Development and Industry since December 2009 (Chair)
- **Dr Alison Elliot OBE**, Convener, SCVO, and former Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland
- **Dr Roger Gibbins**, Chief Executive of NHS Highland from April 2000 until 31 December 2010. Former local authority Director of Social Services
- **Alex Linkston CBE**, Recently retired Chief Executive, West Lothian Council. Pioneer of EFQM-based performance improvement, community planning and single outcome agreements
- **Kaliani Lyle**, Scotland Commissioner of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, former Chief Executive of Citizens Advice Scotland and former Chief Executive of the Scottish Refugee Council
- **Jim McColl OBE**, Chairman and Chief Executive Clyde Blowers, Chairman of Glasgow Works and member of the Scottish Government's Council of Economic Advisers
- **Professor James Mitchell**, School of Government and Public Policy, University of Strathclyde, and published widely on multi-level government, devolution and public policy
- **Eddie Reilly**, former Scottish Secretary of the Public and Commercial Services Union and former member of the General Council of the STUC
- **Councillor Pat Watters CBE**, President, Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. Elected for third term in June 2007. First entered local government in 1982 as a member for East Kilbride and a Councillor in South Lanarkshire Council since 1995
- **Dr Ruth Wishart**, Journalist and broadcaster and Member of the Board of Creative Scotland

The Commission was assisted by three expert advisers:

- **Professor Drew Scott**, Professor of European Union Studies, University of Edinburgh and Co-Director of the Europa Institute.
- **Martin Sime**, Chief Executive, Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations ( SCVO).
- **Dave Watson**, Scottish Organiser (Bargaining and Campaigns), UNISON Scotland.

## **ANNEX B: FULL REMIT OF THE COMMISSION**

Facing the most serious budget reductions for at least a generation, there is an urgent need to ensure the sustainability of Scotland's public services. At the same time we must continue to improve outcomes for the people of Scotland: by driving up the quality of services (so the average meet the standards of the best); and by redesigning services around the needs of citizens, tackling the underlying causes of those needs as well as the symptoms.

We are ambitious for Scotland's public services and wish to take them from good to excellent in every facet and in every place. We have a vision of Scotland's public services that:

- are innovative, seamless and responsive, designed around users' needs, continuously improving
- are democratically accountable to the people of Scotland at both national and local levels
- are delivered in partnership, involving local communities, their democratic representatives, and the third sector
- tackle causes as well as symptoms
- support a fair and equal society
- protect the most vulnerable in our society
- are person-centred, reliable and consistent
- are easy to navigate and access
- are appropriate to local circumstances, without inexplicable variation
- are designed and delivered close to the customer wherever possible, always high quality
- respond effectively to increasing demographic pressures
- include accessible digital services, that are easy to use and meet current best practice in the digital economy
- have governance structures that are accountable, transparent, cost-effective, streamlined and efficient.

The Commission is therefore asked to identify the opportunities and obstacles that will help or hinder progress towards this vision and make recommendations for change that will deliver us to our destination. In particular the Commission is asked to:

- address the role of public services in improving outcomes, what impact they make, and whether this can be done more effectively
- examine structures, functions and roles, to improve the quality of public service delivery and reduce demand through, for example, early intervention
- consider the role of a public service ethos, along with cultural change, engaging public sector workers, users and stakeholders.

The Commission should take a long term view and not be constrained by the current pattern of public service delivery, but should recognise the importance of local communities and the

geography and ethos of Scotland as well as the significant direct and indirect contribution the delivery of public services make to Scotland's economy.

It should have clear regard to joint work already underway to take forward the increasing integration of health and social care and to develop sustainable police and fire services for the future. Updates on work in both areas are expected to be available to the Commission in good time for it to take into account in its recommendations.

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