

**AGE CONCERN NORTHERN IRELAND'S RESPONSE TO  
'The Review of Public Administration  
– A CONSULTATIVE DOCUMENT'**

**1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 Age Concern Northern Ireland is a major voluntary organisation committed through campaigning and service provision to promoting the rights of all older people as active, involved and equal citizens. We act as a Northern Ireland-wide campaigning body and support a network of local Age Concern Groups operating throughout Northern Ireland.
- 1.2 We offer policy advice on a range of issues which impact on the lives of older people. These policies are based on:
- the expressed views of older people throughout Northern Ireland based on on-going contact and research;
  - a knowledge of older people and an ageing society.
- 1.3 Age Concern Northern Ireland is pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the Review of Public Administration. The debate about how public services are structured and delivered will have very significant implications for older people and have aroused considerable concern and speculation.
- 1.4 Over the next twenty years it is estimated that the population of pensionable age will rise in Northern Ireland by over 50%. Twenty-five of the twenty-six District Council areas here will see at least a 15% increase in this age group in the next ten years.
- 1.5 Age Concern Northern Ireland would start from the premise that older people, like everyone else, are primarily concerned with the quality and accessibility of services rather than the structure within which they are delivered. However we believe structures should be tested against the 7 consumer principles, that is, access, choice, information, safety, fairness, redress and representation.
- 1.6 Quality of service may be of course affected by the structure – in particular in relation to accessibility.
- 1.7 We recognise the way service delivery is structured may impact on the quality of service provided. Resource intensive structures can be expensive to run and have a direct on the amount of finance available to spend directly on service provision. None of the proposed models of service delivery have costings attached, therefore it is impossible to determine which might be most effective in terms of balancing the need

- to provide local accountability and accessibility of service provision and the impact this has on the money available to spend directly on services.
- 2.0 As a voluntary organisation, Age Concern Northern Ireland has chosen to be involved in the direct provision of services both in the delivery of day and domiciliary care, as well as running a nursing home. We do so because we believe we provide some added value to the service by being innovative in our approach and in complementing some of the work carried out within the public/ statutory sector. For example, Meadowbank, our home in Omagh is specifically designed for those with advanced dementia and their families and our groundbreaking Respond To Music programme is internationally recognised as an example of best practice.
- 2.1 Age Concern Northern Ireland believes that the fact that we provide services is directly complimentary our lobbying, policy development and advocacy role in the sense that we have direct experience at the 'coalface'.
- 2.1 However, we believe that because of the complexity and the resource implications responsibility for providing the bulk of services should remain within the public sector. There are services we could not and would not wish to provide and should remain the domain of the public sector? (ie we run nursing homes and day centres but would not wish to run a hospital.)
- 3.0 Age Concern Northern Ireland would wish to see a model of public administration might allow the community and voluntary sector to directly influence government policy and which provides access to decision makers. Which of the proposed models provides greatest opportunity to do this is unclear.
- 3.1 Uncertainty, particularly around the structure and role of local councils in recent years has been unhelpful in forward planning. In our opinion there is some evidence of 'empire building' if you like, with some local councils particularly in the greater Belfast area building new offices etc in an attempt to stake their claim to remain independent of a possible 'super council' covering their current boundaries.
- 3.2 Age Concern Northern Ireland feels strongly that if service delivery is to be moved more centrally ( eg by doing away with the Education and Library Boards and Health and Social Services Boards or replacing 26 local Councils by a small number of larger councils with greater responsibility ) then there should be some kind of locally accessible 'one stop shop' type of facility. This would help ensure that people were clear about where they should go if they have a query or complaint about service provision. This may very well be based round current 'town halls' if feedback from this consultation suggested that these were true geographical communities with which people identified.
- 4.0 Age Concern Northern Ireland is delighted to have had the opportunity to respond to this important consultation document and would be pleased to discuss any aspect of it further.