

Towards Smaller Smarter Government

Part three Government and Parliamentary Reform

In part one I looked at the importance of smaller smarter government and what stood in the way of its implementation and in part two what it would mean for the individual and why digital inclusion is a crucial part of creating a fit for future purpose government.

Here I argue that these changes would create an important opportunity to bring meaningful reform to Local Government, the Parliamentary Process and the Legislative Council.

Turning first to Local Government. What needs to be done here is blatantly obvious but really coherent change can only come about in conjunction with radical reform at the centre. The call for that reform is appearing everywhere at an ever increasing rate, examples of which include: the proposal that housing should be restructured around four or five regional bodies, the Chief Constable's 2015 report encouraging more multi profession collaboration in the four policing regions and the new health strategy aiming to bring more health care into the regions. A clear signal must be given that just as government needs to reforms its out dated departmental silos in favour of three policy hubs, local government needs to respond by reforming around four or five regional community hubs. The capacity that digital inclusion provides, as mentioned in the previous two articles, to deliver personalised service to the individual citizen would be considerably enhanced by the contribution local communities could bring to the table. This would include one stop shops in each region bringing personalised government service particularly to those who are fearful of, or uncomfortable with, using modern technology.

Our parliamentary process does not really enjoy a proper balance with executive government. With the advent of the Council of Ministers system where most, if not all members (bar the Speaker), are capable of being in government, scrutiny, when taken as a whole, has either appeared isolated, ineffectual or has lacked depth and coherence. This situation was improved with the introduction of the three scrutiny committees at the start of this current administration but with membership of them cobbled together around the limited number of members available (i.e. not already conflicted by multi departmental memberships) less of a contribution than could and should be provided by them has been achieved. Consolidating strategy and policy around the three executive hubs would release more members to become engaged in the three 'mirror' scrutiny committees which are already in place. Not enough emphasis is given to the important role constructive scrutiny plays and for that reason I strongly believe that the Chairs of these committees should enjoy the same income lift that currently applies to

departmental membership, a move which, when all the changes are taken together in the round, would cost less, not more, that is currently the case.

It is generally accepted that the Legislative Council is also long overdue a review of its roles and functions. There needs to be a move away from the current rather clumsy arrangement where members look like 'me too' MHKs. MLCs should have their own distinct, well understood and well respected roles. They need to be removed from serving as members of departments but have their scrutiny duties increased to cover European in addition to Isle of Man legislation as well as having an enhanced role on the Scrutiny committees.

The electorate should not only be able to have confidence in an administration's ability to define a clear well articulate five year programme but also that it will enjoy mature and, I am sorry to use this word yet again - constructive, scrutiny. The changes proposed here would move us on significantly from our current system and structure – one that is unable to pursue more than overarching broad based principles which over time become defused and contradictory as absorption and dilution takes hold. This as a direct result of the independence of the departmental silos.

Clearer policy making, better scrutiny and more clearly defined roles in executive, legislative and local government as well as parliamentary process, will progressively grow out of the adoption of a single legal entity and digital inclusion. It is time to move forward.

In part four I will cover why I believe it is so important that we pursue a radical agenda and what I believe might well be the outcome if we do not.