

NEWS FROM REFORM SCOTLAND

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Devolving civil service is key to better government, says Reform Scotland manifesto

Responsibility for the civil service in Scotland should be devolved from Westminster to Holyrood to promote economic prosperity and improve public services, a leading think tank declares today in its manifesto ahead of the Scottish election.

Switching control of the service from London to Edinburgh is part of a fundamental reform of the way in which government is structured so that it operates in a more effective and transparent manner.

A radical overhaul of the civil service set-up is one of the key elements of Reform Scotland's manifesto published today [fri], in its section ***Delivering Better Government***.

The influential, non-party think tank says that the prevailing culture within the civil service does not encourage innovation in policy-making and this is caused fundamentally by an absence of clear accountability.

The manifesto states: 'The civil service in Scotland, which is responsible for the delivery of Scottish government policy, is part of the Home Civil Service and ultimately responsible to the UK Prime Minister. Following devolution, this is no longer sensible and accountability would be enhanced if responsibility for the Scottish civil service was devolved to the Scottish Parliament, with the First Minister having sole responsibility for appointing the Permanent Secretary.'

Reform Scotland calls for the proposed Scottish Civil Service to recognise this by moving away from the traditional appointments process and giving democratically elected politicians the power to appoint senior civil servants as happens in other countries such as France, Australia and Canada.

'This democratic accountability is the best way of holding senior civil servants to account and has enhanced performance since its introduction in Australia in 2004,' the manifesto adds.

It also calls for an end to the 'the doctrine of ministerial responsibility which shields officials from taking personal responsibility for their actions and also draws Ministers into the process of policy delivery.

'Instead, Ministers should be responsible for the strategic direction of policy and its communication, while officials are responsible for the construction of policy and the use of resources.'

Civil servants must act as if all decisions are subject to scrutiny, with parliamentary committees calling a wider range of officials to give evidence in their particular policy areas.

Reform Scotland's manifesto also covers a wide range of government policy areas reflecting the research and recommendations from its reports over the last three years aimed at finding better ways of delivering increased economic prosperity and more effective public services.

Ben Thomson, Reform Scotland chairman, said the party manifestos that will be produced in the run-up to the May Holyrood election would inevitably focus on short-term issues.

He added: 'The current financial and public sector crisis will neither be solved in a few years nor by tinkering around the edges. It has highlighted that there are some real, long-term structural problems within our society that need to be addressed if we are to have a healthy economy with good public services. We need to have a plan for Scotland for the next 20 years that enables the next generation to compete without the benefits of our oil resources which will diminish over time.

He said the central ambition of Reform Scotland's manifesto was to create the right environment for long-term economic growth and effective public services based on two broad ideas.

'First, we need to devolve responsibility. The current system of centralised control over budgets at all levels of government does not create a system of responsibility and accountability. Westminster is responsible for setting the rate for 93% of all taxes in Scotland, but only 40% of public sector spending. Even if the Scotland Bill is passed in its current form over 80% of tax revenue will be based on rates set by Westminster. This creates completely the wrong incentive for politicians and civil servants since allocated grants tend to focus the receiver on how to spend them and not how to deliver the most effective service at the best price for the end user.

'We believe Scotland should take responsibility for setting and collecting the taxes which raise the £33 billion of revenue spent by Holyrood. In addition local government should also have far greater powers to set taxes for their element of this expenditure.

This can be done within the United Kingdom, but there is a need to rebalance the relationship between Westminster, Holyrood and local government to create more direct accountability to the public at each level of government.

'Secondly, we need to re-think how we deliver public services and that means addressing some of the sacred cows such as how our health and education systems are structured. It is not just a question of money; the Scottish Government has spent around 55% more in real terms since devolution on health and 40% more on education, yet the overall results have not improved by anything like the same amount and these services have not always served the most disadvantaged in our society well.'

Mr Thomson added: 'We have set out a long-term vision for Scotland that seeks real structural reform across all areas of the public sector. We believe we need to influence policy makers today to be bolder and more far-sighted to create a stronger Scotland for tomorrow.'

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Notes to Editors:

- **A copy of Reform Scotland's Manifesto is attached**
- **Reform Scotland is an independent, non-party think tank that aims to set out a better way to deliver increased economic prosperity and more effective public services based on the traditional Scottish principles of limited government, diversity and personal responsibility.**

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Press Release issued on behalf of Reform Scotland by [hay mckerron associates](#).

