Placement with Leeds City Council report

Catherine Powell

Outline of research project

The purpose of my research project was to investigate the impact of the 2010 Spending Review on public services in Leeds. Public service areas included; health, transport, Leeds city council, police, universities and higher education institutions. More specifically the purpose was to investigate the implications for employment, service and finance of the above mentioned public services.

Data was obtained through semi structured interviews with key players in public services in Leeds. Where interviews were not possible questionnaires were used. Furthermore ranges of literature including policy documents were examined across all service areas.

Key outcomes

The intentions of Spending Review are to reduce the deficit whilst encouraging social mobility and economic growth. It is argued that savings must be made in the short term so that the UK can maintain its financial creditability. In order to reach these recommendations the following general reforms are put forward. First that there should be greater efficiencies through reorganisation, use of IT, a reduction in bureaucracy and back office costs, second that power should be devolved to the local level, third that there should be greater transparency and accountability giving public greater power on local decisions resulting in a fundamental change in relationship between the citizen and the state, forth that the government should not be seen as the only provider of services, private enterprise, voluntary groups and the public should have the chance to run these services, and fifth that services and projects that protect economic growth should be prioritised.

In doing so it was argued that services such as the NHS could be protected whilst other service areas could be reduced. This project highlighted how reducing support in one public service area could have implications for other public service areas. Removing funding from one public service could unintentionally place a great burden on another. For example, the implication of removing funding from transport could be felt by NHS, employment and the environment in Leeds.

The strive for greater efficiencies and spending reductions has resulted in job losses across the public sector in Leeds. However it appears that in most cases the posts that have been lost up to now have been voluntary. There are indications that there may be further non voluntary job losses later in the Spending Review period in some public service areas. In addition the
decision to devolve more power to the local level has meant a change in the way that funding is organised.

**Summary of key learning and benefits of program**

I gained experience in a whole range of areas I was previously unfamiliar with. Given the length of the placement I had to learn these areas very quickly. For example, it was necessary to understand to some extent which organisations received funding from a particular source in each public service area before the Spending Review in order to understand how recent changes may have impacted on this.

I gained significant experience in working independently and using my own initiatives. For example due to the sensitive nature of the research (at a time when many organisations are having their funding reduced) I found it much more challenging to establish trust and gain access with potential interviewees in a short space of time.