

## **CIPFA in the Midlands and PwC Question Time debate – the Austerity Agenda Briefing**

At the end of 2011, CIPFA in the Midlands and PwC hosted the first ever Question Time style debate for the Midlands.

Never before have the issues of austerity and the impact on public services been so much in the public spotlight. The response from the public sector and its finance professionals has been to drive cost savings, but also to begin to focus on much more radical ways to meet the policy and financial imperatives. The debate focused more on the strategic direction of the public sector rather than the ‘simple’ technicalities of cost reduction or managing within a budget as many would see the ‘austerity agenda’.

The discussion highlighted some real paradigm shifts in thinking:

- from a focus on public service provision to securing outcomes and well-being
- a much more partnership orientated approach to the relationships between public and private sectors, underpinned by mutual incentivisation, perhaps exploring approaches like social impact bonds
- from working alone as public sector ‘statutory bodies’ to a more fluid model perhaps organised around people and place – a blurring of boundaries
- from an absolute focus on supply efficiency to more on effectiveness, demand and achieving agreed goals
- from imposition of solutions based on professional judgement to more co-creation with citizens and users, and
- doing different things, rather than the same things faster, and at lower cost.

The importance of the accounting profession was emphasised, not just the absolutely critical role in ‘keeping score’, but also in providing strategic financial input to the decision making process and consideration of future direction.

There was consensus around the importance of **investment** and the broader impact this can have, and the need for confidence – to proceed until apprehended and seek forgiveness rather than permission. This will be the focus of ***our next Question Time debate on 16 April 2012 5.00 - 6.30 PM PwC, Birmingham.***

<p><b><u>Key issues for Finance Leaders</u></b></p> <p>What can I add to a changing focus away from pure service delivery and into securing outcomes?</p> <p>Am I helping shape future thinking or just responding to others' agendas?</p> <p>Am I focussed on the areas where transformation needs to be driven and do I have all the information to influence these decisions including demand drivers?</p> <p>Am I reviewing the key metrics to track benefits realisation for projects in my organisation?</p> <p>Did we learn the lessons from PFI and can I get assurance that my teams can deliver real value to local people through any future infrastructure investment?</p>	<p><b><u>Key issues for CIPFA members</u></b></p> <p>There is a need to work more collaboratively to embrace changes like commissioning, so I need to have the wider skills (e.g. influencing skills, negotiating skills) necessary to support partnership working and if not how to I gain these?</p> <p>Am I clear about how to support my leaders' new agendas set out here?</p> <p>Am I up to date with the latest thinking on the public sector, what changes are likely, and the impact on finance?</p> <p>Am I supporting the infrastructure plans for my organisation effectively? Do my teams understand the context of the lack of revenue and capital funding and how we may address this challenge?</p>
<p><b><u>Key issues for CIPFA students</u></b></p> <p>Am I aware of the future expectations of CIPFA professionals, or more focused on the past?</p> <p>Am I aware of the key transformation projects in my organisation?</p> <p>How can I look for ways to get involved and use my skills to support effective decision making?</p> <p>Am I aware of the types of infrastructure funding available and how I may be able to support my organisation in making financial plans to deliver investment?</p>	<p><b><u>Key issues for employers</u></b></p> <p>Whatever change is made in the public sector, financial support and integrity will be paramount. Do we have the right people with the right skills to keep up on the right track; but also moving forward in the right way?</p> <p>Unemployment could worsen and hamper the region's recover unless the Government takes urgent action to tackle it – could local and central government do more...?</p> <p>What financial strategies are being presented to me to deliver infrastructure investment plans in my organisation/area?</p>

**Notes**

CIPFA in the Midlands provides an active community of interest for CIPFA members and students, finance leaders and regional employers. We support learning and development in order to develop Members' future career prospects and to provide a skilled and committed workforce in the region in a changing world. We aim to influence national policy and public finance agendas through our networks based on our regional experience. We also aim to support take up of the CIPFA qualification in order to maintain a vibrant Student and Members network into the future

The debate was hosted by Lisa Commane – President CIPFA in the Midlands

**Chair**

Michael Kitts – Head of Government & Public Sector and Consulting, Partner PwC LLP

**The Panel**

Dr Martin Reeves – CEO Coventry City Council and CEO Coventry and Warwickshire LEP

Professor David Bailey – Professor of Economics, Coventry University

Bob Pattni – Executive Director, Birmingham Metropolitan College

Paul Dransfield – Strategic Director of Corporate Resources, Birmingham City Council