

Modernising Government: A New Way to Manage Property Assets?

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ABSTRACT

Since the UK Audit Commission's report on local authorities in 1988 there has been considerable debate about the effectiveness of the management and use of real estate assets within the public sector. Working within the Value-For-Money framework it is sometimes hard to see the benefits of public ownership. However it is also clear that in many corporate environments, economy, efficiency and effectiveness are not transparent. To improve service provision in the public sector it may not simply be a process of privatisation or centralisation. Large public bodies have, in the past, suffered from excess bureaucracy whilst some that have been privatised have proved to fail in areas of service provision. Across the public sector there have been a variety of attempts to achieve VFM from those based on restructuring management to those more radical which outsource provision. There are also many examples of good practice from the public sector in other countries.

This background taken together with the more inventive way of meeting the real estate needs of organisations opens up opportunities for a more creative approach to the provision within the public sector. Any approach however would have to demonstrate not only VFM but also meet the less well defined aspects of democracy and local governance which are seen as the foundation of much of the public sector in the UK today.

The paper examines some of the issues involved in the management of public sector assets.

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