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## Responding to the risk of reducing resources: Development of a framework for future change programmes in Environmental Health Services

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**Abstract:** Environmental Health services in the UK have been subject to significant resource reduction over the last 5 years. It is suggested that services risk becoming unsustainable unless efficient and effective ways of working are employed. With this in mind this paper presents the findings of research into the experience of practitioners who are developing and delivering evolving Environmental Health services in English local authorities in the context of deep cutting budget reductions. The research explores the experience of change and identifies lessons learnt in the development and execution of new models of Environmental Health service delivery to mitigate against risks of unsustainable or undeliverable services. Interviews were carried out with the participants to capture their experience of change and the impact on service delivery. A range of service delivery models have been examined including outsourcing, shared services, regional delivery models and discussion of mutual arrangements and at various stages of development from planning through to full transformation. Field work was undertaken between 2014 and 2016. Thematic analysis of interview transcripts has identified six emergent themes of the experience of change: managing changes effectively; understanding the reasons for change; understanding the nature of Environmental Health; meaningful consultation; viability of the proposal; planning and timeliness. Environmental Health services undergoing transformation may benefit from taking into account the lessons learnt by organisations that have previously undergone significant change in their response to the risk of a reducing resource.

**Keywords:** Environmental Health; austerity; regulation; emerging risk; outsourcing; managing change.

### 1. Introduction

*Context:* Environmental Health is a discipline with an historic basis in public health protection which has developed into a modern profession. The World Health Organisation (2006) advocates a regulatory perspective within the public health discipline. In many countries this has emerged in the form of Environmental Health services. Such services seek to ensure a healthy environment across a range of areas including: where we live; where we work; what we eat; and the quality of the surrounding natural environment. The landscape for Environmental Health service delivery in the United Kingdom (UK) is affected by a range of complex external forces. These include drivers for better regulation (Kellett 2008), regulatory change, austerity (Gainsbury and Neville 2005), devolution (Sandford 2015a), social context, delivery models (Grant Thornton UK 2014) and delivery ethos. Social and economic contexts such as changing demographics, economic change and political change present further challenges. Performance measurement with an emphasis on accountability, value for money and outcomes focus, leading to “New Public Management (NPM)” has developed as a managerialist perspective on the delivery of public services (Massey & Pyper 2005) and is established via privatisation, reorganisation, competition and improved efficiency. The message from the UK government is clear, in that, it wants local authorities to transform services to adapt to this new context. Oversight of this “improvement” process has been led by the Audit Commission (dissolved in 2015) and the Local Better Regulation Office, later reformed as the Better Regulation Delivery Office.

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