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## Summary

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# More haste, less speed

## – the government service offices under new management

### Summary

The Swedish National Audit Office (Swedish NAO) has audited whether the local government service organisation under the auspices of the National Government Service Centre (SSC) is appropriate and effective for making high quality government service available throughout the country. At the end of 2022, the service organisation will consist of 129 government service centres across the country where private individuals, business owners and companies can receive service of a simpler nature from the Swedish Social Insurance Agency, the Swedish Pensions Agency, the Swedish Tax Agency and the Swedish Public Employment Service.

The overall conclusion of the Swedish NAO is that the new service organisation is unable to guarantee that all visitors receive equitable service of high quality. The audit has identified a number of deficiencies and risks that should be addressed by the SSC and the cooperation agencies. To prevent the service from deteriorating, these deficiencies should be remedied before affiliating new authorities to the service offices.

### **The SSC finds it difficult to handle the conflict between onsite requirements and cost effectiveness**

Since the SSC took over the service office operations in June 2019, a growing number of service offices have opened in various locations around the country. At

the same time, there is a long-term trend of dwindling numbers of visits and rising costs per visit. The Swedish NAO notes that the workload and costs per visit also vary greatly between offices. There is thus a risk that the quality of the service offered also differs between offices. Despite this, the SSC lacks a practical way of tracking the progression of costs and workload, as well as principles for directing resources to where they are most useful. The Government's micro-management of office locations makes it difficult for the SSC to simultaneously relate to the requirements on cost effectiveness and quality.

### **National Government Service Centre has not effectively organised activities at the service offices**

The audit shows that there are several deficiencies in how activities are organised at the service offices. This includes the fact that the SSC has introduced a uniform working method at the service offices without checking the suitability of the premises and the technology. This has exacerbated previously existing problems of overhearing and long login times in the agencies' operational systems.

The Swedish NAO also notes that the service offices very seldom engage interpreters, despite the fact that poor language skills is considered to be the main reason why people visit the service offices. Therefore, it is doubtful whether it is possible to ensure that all visitors receive the help they are entitled to.

### **Training and information provision do not support clarity and uniformity**

The audit shows that many service officers do not perceive that they have a clear role and in their view, different officers provide service at different levels.

There are shortcomings and large variations in the training and the provision of information that the cooperation agencies offer to service officers. This is partly because no government agency has overall responsibility for adapting the information to the service officers and for the opportunity and time for them to grasp it. Improvements in these areas could help lead to a more uniform knowledge level among the officers and create better prospects for providing equal service.

### **Overall responsibility for the follow-up of the service quality is lacking**

The audit shows that follow-up for assessing the quality of the service is insufficient. This is partly because it is difficult to measure quality, but it is also a consequence of the shared responsibility. The SSC is currently responsible for the follow-up, while the cooperation agencies are responsible for the content of the

service. The SSC does not consider that it has sufficient competence to follow up the content of the service and it is difficult for the cooperation agencies to follow up activities carried out at another government agency. The result is that no one takes overall responsibility for the follow-up of the quality of the service.

The Swedish NAO notes that the follow-up of how cases are resolved at the service offices risks underestimating the degree of unnecessary demand. According to the service officers, there is a big problem concerning the fact that they are unable to help visitors with matters at government agencies that are affiliated at a lower service level and whose operational systems they do not have access to. This is an important finding, not least in light of the fact that the Government and the SSC are planning to affiliate services from more government agencies to the service offices.

## **A risk of shortcomings being exacerbated as more government agencies become affiliated**

Finally, the Swedish NAO notes that the challenges highlighted in the report risk being exacerbated as more government agencies are affiliated. The current difficulties in resourcing the activities in the best way will become even greater with the addition of more government agencies and more parallel operational logistics.

Service officers' opportunities and time to grasp the information about more government agencies will diminish. There is an upper limit for how much service officers, as generalists, can handle at a good quality level. This situation can be addressed by lowering service levels, but risks leading to service offices being unable to help visitors with requested services. We already see signs of this with regard to the service provided on behalf of the Swedish Public Employment Service. The alternative is to specialise the service officers. However, how this is to be applied in practice and within given budget frameworks is unclear.

## **Recommendations**

### **Recommendations to the Government**

- Leave office location decisions to the National Government Service Centre to achieve good accessibility and also enabling trade-offs between quality and cost effectiveness.

## Recommendations to the Government and to the National Government Service Centre

- Do not affiliate more government agencies before ensuring that the organisation is able to provide quality service within the framework of existing and new remits.

## Recommendations to the National Government Service Centre

- Produce a model for following up cost progression and staffing at office level.
- Ensure that interpreters are engaged as needed.

## Recommendation to the National Government Service Centre and the cooperation agencies

- Coordinate and adapt provision of information and training for the service officers' role and remit.
- Ensure that the follow-up that is performed is sufficient to assess the quality of the service.