



National Indicators for Local Authorities
and Local Authority Partnerships:
Handbook of Definitions
Feedback on Consultation



National Indicators for Local Authorities
and Local Authority Partnerships:
Handbook of Definitions
Feedback on Consultation

Communities and Local Government
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London
SW1E 5DU
Telephone: 020 7944 4400
Website: www.communities.gov.uk

© Crown Copyright, 2008

Copyright in the typographical arrangement rests with the Crown.

This publication, excluding logos, may be reproduced free of charge in any format or medium for research, private study or for internal circulation within an organisation. This is subject to it being reproduced accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Crown copyright and the title of the publication specified.

Any other use of the contents of this publication would require a copyright licence. Please apply for a Click-Use Licence for core material at www.opsi.gov.uk/click-use/system/online/pLogin.asp, or by writing to the Office of Public Sector Information, Information Policy Team, St Clements House, 2-16 Colegate, Norwich, NR3 1BQ.
Fax: 01603 723000 or email: HMSOlicensing@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk

If you require this publication in an alternative format please email alternativeformats@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Communities and Local Government Publications
PO Box 236
Wetherby
West Yorkshire
LS23 7NB
Tel: 08701 226 236
Fax: 08701 226 237
Textphone: 08701 207 405
Email: communities@twoten.com
or online via the Communities and Local Government website: www.communities.gov.uk

75% recycled
This is printed on
75% recycled paper

March 2008

Product Code: 07 LGSR 05193/a

Contents

Introduction	5
The consultation process	5
Workshops	6
Responses received	6
Taking the consultation response forward	7
General comments	8
Disaggregation	13
Taking forward work on data burden reductions	17

Introduction

1. The new performance framework for local government, which was outlined in the White Paper *Strong and Prosperous Communities* is about improving the quality of life in places and better public services. It brings together national standards and priorities set by Government with local priorities informed by the vision developed by the local authority with its partners. A clear set of national outcomes and a single set of national indicators by which to measure progress against them are a key building block for the new framework.

The consultation process

2. In October 2007, as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR), the Government announced a new single set of 198 national indicators for English local authorities and local authority partnerships. The indicators flow from the priorities identified in Public Service Agreements (PSAs) and Departmental Strategic Objectives (DSOs) announced in the CSR.
3. On 8 November the Government launched a public consultation exercise on the detailed definitions which will underpin each of the 198 national indicators. The definitions were set out in a draft Handbook containing templates in a common format in four annexes;

C1: Stronger and safer communities

C2: Children and young people

C3: Adult health and well-being and tackling exclusion and promoting equality

C4: Local economy and environmental sustainability.

Respondents were asked for comments on

- a. the clarity of each technical definition
- b. whether the technical definitions as drafted will lead to any unintended consequences
- c. whether there are any definitions that will not work in practice
- d. whether the right spatial level of reporting has been defined for each indicator
- e. which indicators would be suitable for disaggregation
- f. any other comments on the templates, including suggestions for improvement.

The Government did not ask for views on whether individual indicators should be included in the new single set of national indicators, nor on the substance or the balance of outcomes represented by the indicators. That was because the indicators represent Government decisions on national priorities to be delivered by local government which were taken at the Comprehensive Spending Review 2007.

The consultation closed on 21 December 2007.

4. A number of the indicators in the national set were also proposed for inclusion in the set of indicators for Assessments of Policing and Community Safety (APACS). The Home Office ran a separate consultation on APACS indicators from 7 December 2007 to 18 January 2008. Respondents with views on joint APACS/national indicators were asked to provide their comments through the APACS consultation arrangements. Feedback on the APACS consultation will be available from the Home Office website: <http://police.homeoffice.gov.uk/apacs>.
5. Communities and Local Government also ran a separate consultation on proposals for the new Place Survey which will provide the data for 19 of the national indicators. The Place Survey consultation closed on 8 February and feedback will be published shortly.

Workshops

6. As part of the consultation process, workshops were held in Leicester and Newmarket as part of the LAA Roadshows, and in Birmingham and Exeter, arranged by the Government Offices. A further workshop was arranged in London focusing on equalities and the national indicator set. All workshops were well attended with a mix of representation from different local partners, but with a majority from local authority policy and performance staff. The workshops provided a useful forum for discussion, questions and feedback on the national indicator set, and provided a useful supplement to the more formal consultation process.

Level of response

7. There was a very high level of interest in the consultation. There were 583 separate formal responses to the consultation exercise. Of these, 401 responses came from local authorities, 75 from other local partners, 49 from national bodies and the remaining 58 came from a variety of other organisations, interest groups and individuals.

Taking the consultation response forward

- 8.** Respondents provided their comments on the draft Handbook of Definitions to Communities and Local Government via an electronic response system, email or hard copy. Communities and Local Government collated responses for each indicator and undertook some initial analysis, before passing on to the relevant Government Department. Departments then revised indicator definitions taking into account points raised in the consultation. A number of amendments were also made to reflect points on consistency made in response to the consultation.
- 9.** Final definitions for 138 of the indicators were published on 29 February 2008. Definitions for the remaining 60 indicators were published on 31 March, alongside this feedback report.
- 10.** This report provides information on the common general comments raised through the consultation and gives the Government's response to these.

General Comments

- 11.** The majority of those who commented welcomed the opportunity which the consultation exercise afforded them to feed back on the Local Government National Indicator Set. There was a considerable body of support for the Government's aim of moving to a single, smaller, more outcome-focused set of indicators.

Other sets of indicators

- 12.** There were some concerns that, whilst the stated intention of Government, as expressed in the White Paper *Strong and Prosperous Communities*, was to reduce the burden on local government; in practice some central agencies (such as the Youth Justice Board, DCSF and the Electoral Commission) were applying pressure on local authorities to continue collecting data for and reporting on indicators which these agencies perceived as priorities but are not amongst the 198 national indicators. Another concern was that additional performance indicators might be added despite assurances to the contrary.

The Government remains committed to the principle that the national indicators will be the only indicators against which local authorities and local authority partnerships will be performance managed by central government. Communities and Local Government will continue to work with other bodies, such as the Electoral Commission, which have powers to set performance indicators for local government, to ensure that those powers are exercised in line with the overall aims of the new performance framework.

Timing

- 13.** Many respondents, even amongst those who were generally positive about the proposed changes, were concerned that timescales were unrealistic. It was argued that the consultation period was very short given the number of partners with whom local authorities needed to liaise. There was also some disappointment that the consultations about the Place Survey and the APACS Performance Indicators were not issued at the same time as the National Set.

The Government accepts that the time allowed for the consultation was short. However, the Central Local Partnership memorandum of understanding between central and local government permits a six week period of consultation, which on this occasion was agreed with the Local Government Association so as not to delay negotiation of Local Area Agreements (LAAs). Although it was not possible to conduct the

consultation on the handbook of definitions to the same timescale as that for APACS and the Place Survey, Communities and Local Government has worked with the Home Office to ensure that responses to all three consultations are co-ordinated.

- 14.** The timetable set out for implementing the new national indicators was queried by a number of those who responded who felt that the publication of the final definitions in February left too little time to put in place systems and processes to begin collection, particularly given that a significant proportion of these were new indicators. It was suggested by some that implementation of some of the new indicators should be delayed until 2009.

Only a minority of indicators will be collected directly by local authorities, and of these, most will be collected through the new Place Survey. The first survey will not be undertaken until autumn 2008. Most indicators use data from existing collections. Definitions for all other new indicators which rely on a new data collection directly from local authorities were published on 29 February 2008.

Clarity of definitions

- 15.** Some frustration was also expressed that a number of the indicators were not sufficiently defined and the hope was expressed a number of times that there might be another consultation exercise once the national indicator set had been fully defined (the question of whether definitions might change during the period of the LAA was also raised). There was a good deal of criticism over what was perceived to be a lack of clarity. Estimates of the extent of this problem varied but one response suggested that 45% were unclear. This apparent lack of clarity took a number of forms. Some indicators were criticised for not being performance indicators at all but merely numbers. Some of the indicator titles were considered to be misleading or confusing. Other indicators were described as self assessment or risk assessment rather than performance indicators.

Further work has been undertaken since the consultation and all indicators for introduction from April 2008 have now been fully defined, and changes have been made to some indicator titles. There are 13 indicators which will not be introduced until 2009/10 as definitions and/or methodologies which underpin them need further development. There will be a further consultation on the definitions for these indicators before they are introduced. It is not intended that, once final definitions have been published, that there will be any significant changes during the next three years, although minor amendments to improve clarity may be considered.

Measurement of performance

- 16.** The outcome focus of the indicators was welcomed, however some local authorities expressed the view that there was a lack of clarity in respect of how the work they do impacts, or was expected to impact upon, certain indicators, and they argued that without this there could be no measurement of performance.

It is important to recognise that the new indicator set represents a significant shift in focus away from measurement of the performance of individual organisations towards measurement of improvement in outcomes achieved by local partners working together. Within the new performance framework local authorities have a clear community leadership role, bringing local partners together to deliver that improvement for local people.

Content of the set

- 17.** Some responses highlighted what they felt was a lack of balance in respect of the indicators; there are, for example, forty indicators connected with attainment at school but only one covering conditions in the workplace. A number of those who responded expressed concerns about the small number of indicators dedicated to certain topics, for example “narrowing the gap” in respect of economic opportunities, the natural environment, libraries, mental health, long-term worklessness and private sector housing decency.

The consultation did not seek views on the content of the set, as this had been determined through the Comprehensive Spending Review process. The set provides a clear statement of Government’s priority for delivery by local government and its partners over the next three years. However, there are many services and activities which will continue to be important to local people and businesses and which local authorities and their partners will continue to need to performance manage locally.

Costs

- 18.** There were also a number of responses which expressed the concern that too little consideration had been given to the potential future cost implications of the proposed changes.

Performance against the majority of national indicators will be reported by Government Departments and other agencies rather than local authorities and partners themselves. Therefore we do not expect that there will be significant new cost burdens for local government in implementing the new indicator set.

Technical issues

19. A number of more technical issues relevant to the definitions were raised;

a) For data to be useful in terms of performance management it needed to be available half-yearly or perhaps quarterly, rather than yearly in arrears. Also it was felt that time periods were not adequately/specifically labelled (i.e. calendar, financial or academic). It was also suggested that there should be a standardised starting point in respect of all data.

It is intended that data will be reported and made available as frequently as possible, bearing in mind the availability of data and the practicality of reporting for each individual indicator. All reporting frequencies have been reviewed for consistency.

b) a number of indicators which would be without baseline information against which to measure performance. Moreover, the lack of this information meant that local authorities were unable to give some of these indicators the priority they may require.

Government offices will be able to provide advice on a case by case basis. For some new indicators, especially those without any local data which could inform target setting, LSPs may want to decide to set a target against the indicator in question, but to wait until the first annual review to do so. Alternatively they could decide to set a target of a certain % increase over baseline, and to confirm the baseline at the annual review.

c) some indicators are measured on the basis of a year-on-year percentage change, it was pointed out that using this measure without baseline figures could be subject to the “phenomenon of regression to the mean” which may create an impression of significant rises, followed by significant falls, where in actual fact the figures upon which these movements are based simply do not alter.

It is intended that the data reported for such indicators will include the underlying values for individual years’ performance, upon which the year on year change is calculated. This will provide the context necessary to assess the significance of any change year on year, and will provide a basis for comparison with other areas.

d) too many indicators measure ‘perception’ however local residents’ perceptions are shaped by many factors over which local authorities and partners do not have control, including the media and national events.

The Government believes that it is right to include measures which gauge local people’s perceptions about things that are important to them in the area in which they live. Perception measures are a key element of a performance framework which is focused on outcomes for local people.

e) there are a number of ‘composite’ indicators which are made up of several different parts, so in effect there are more than 198 indicators.

There are a limited number of indicators which require more than one data value to be reported, but these are generally taken from the same data stream. Where targets are set against these indicators in LAAs, there will be only one target. There will therefore be no additional reporting or performance management burden.

f) many indicators rely on the use of ONS mid-year population estimates, however these are considered by some respondents to be unreliable, particularly in areas which have seen large-scale migration in recent years.

ONS mid-year population estimates are the only consistent source of population data currently available.

g) a comprehensive list of those indicators for which each agency is responsible in terms of collecting the data and producing reports is required. This is especially important in areas with 2 tier authorities.

A table giving this information was published with the final Handbook of Definitions.

h) national indicators which are the same as existing performance indicators should be identified.

A table giving this information is included in the final Handbook of Definitions.

Disaggregation

- 20.** Local authorities and their partners are required to fulfil a range of statutory equalities duties. They need to have suitable mechanisms in place to monitor and deliver on these duties. Disaggregation of the national indicators by equalities strands – ethnicity, gender, religion, age, sexual orientation and disability – could be used to identify groups of people within an area who are disadvantaged in relation to the outcome being measured by the indicator, and enable local authorities to prioritise, and where appropriate, set targets aimed specifically at delivering improvement for those groups in the LAA. However it is important to balance the advantages of using this more fine-grained information against any additional reporting burdens and costs involved in collecting and monitoring it.
- 21.** The consultation asked respondents to give their views on which indicators they would like to see disaggregated by each or any of the six equalities. Those indicators which most respondents who expressed a view wanted to see disaggregated are listed in the table which follows, starting with the most popular.

Indicators which respondents said they would like to see disaggregated by equalities strands

NI No	Indicator name	Ethnicity	Gender	Religion	Age	Sexual Orientation	Disability
9	Use of public libraries	X	X	X	X	X	X
11	Engagement in the arts	X	X	X	X	X	X
10	Visits to museums or galleries	X	X	X	X	X	X
125	Achieving independence for older people through rehabilitation/intermediate care	X	X	X	X		X
8	Adult participation in sport	X	X	X	X		X
127	Self reported experience of social care users	X	X	X	X		X
14	Avoidable contact: The average number of customer contacts per resolved request	X	X	X		X	X
130	Social Care clients receiving Self Directed Support (Direct Payments and Individual Budgets)	X	X		X		X
132	Timeliness of social care assessment	X	X		X		X
110	Young people's participation in positive activities		X				X
1	% of people who believe people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area			X		X	
27	Understanding of local concerns about anti-social behaviour and crime by the local council and police			X			
6	Participation in regular volunteering			X		X	
133	Timeliness of social care packages				X		

NI No	Indicator name	Ethnicity	Gender	Religion	Age	Sexual Orientation	Disability
136	People supported to live independently through social services (all ages)				x		
2	% of people who feel that they belong to their neighbourhood					x	
3	Civic participation in the local area					x	
69	Children who have experienced bullying (OFSTED)					x	
156	Number of households living in Temporary Accommodation					x	
131	Delayed transfers of care from hospitals	x					

22. Communities and Local Government, working with other Departments, will be taking forward work on disaggregation over the next few months in order to identify:

- those indicators which stakeholder consider it would be useful to disaggregate and for which disaggregated data is already available;
- those for which disaggregated data could be made available at relatively little additional cost and burden; and
- those which stakeholders consider it important to disaggregate where the information is likely to be difficult to provide at present, to understand whether there options for doing so in the future.

We will develop a programme of work to deliver disaggregated data for national indicators over the period of CSR07.

Taking forward work on reducing data burdens

- 23.** Many respondents applauded the intention underwriting the new indicator set of reducing the burdens of data collection and submission on local government. It was also noted that around half of the 'new indicators' were already being collected and the sense of continuity which this created was noted with approval.
- 24.** There were, however, a number who questioned whether the reduction from an estimated 1200 indicators to a more modest 198 was more apparent than real. Others pointed out that, even if the proposed changes were accepted at face value, there would be an initial period where the old system was winding down at the same time as the new one was being introduced, which would create, initially at least, even more of a burden. Some questions were raised as to whether in fact the old system would actually be wound down. It was pointed out that the abolition of the Social Services Performance Assessment Framework (PAF) would not reduce the burden upon local authorities "unless the underlying RAP, 903, OC2 and CPR3 data returns are also reduced or dispensed with".

As stated in the 2006 Local Government White Paper, no other data outside of the National Indicator Set will be collected for performance management reasons, but it will be necessary to collect some additional data for non-performance management uses, such as financial reporting and to inform the development of national policy. However, we are committed to reducing the amount of such additional information collected, and the commitment made at CSR07 to a 30% reduction in front-line data streams by May 2010 sets out a long term timetable for doing so.

It will take time to implement a process to review existing data collections and we want to agree with local government which additional data streams remain useful for reasons other than performance management. Work has already begun on implementing a common process and timetable across Whitehall, and more information on this is contained in the final Handbook of Definitions.

As the majority of indicators in the new set will be calculated from existing data returns to government departments, there should be no cause for concern that the reporting burden could rise in short term. Also, there will be no requirement for separate reporting of discontinued BVPIs, though underlying data may continue to be collected in statistical returns, subject to the review process described above.