



An Outcomes Framework for Supporting People:

**Why it was needed, how it came about and
the implications for service providers**

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Introduction

In November 2005, Communities and Local Government (then ODPM) announced in its Supporting People consultation paper that it intended to move towards an outcomes approach to the monitoring of the Supporting People programme. It also made clear that it was not sure what this would look like in practice and made an open invitation for suggestions.

At this point the London Housing Foundation had four years of experience of supporting service providers in taking an outcomes approach and had a considerable body of knowledge and tools to call on. The Foundation commissioned Triangle Consulting, which has delivered the majority of its programme to propose a national framework. It soon became apparent that gaining an understanding of what an outcomes approach means for providers was only part of the picture. Developing a national outcomes approach to Supporting People meant finding a formula that would reconcile the overlapping but different needs of providers, commissioners and central government – without creating a web of bureaucracy so thick as to strangle the actual provision of services.

Finding the right formula

The formula that was needed was one that would:-

- Enable providers to monitor the outcomes of their services in a way that was meaningful to workers and clients, and provide information that would enable the service to learn from its successes and failures to improve services
- Enable local authorities to assess service performance and take an overview of the achievements of Supporting People within their area
- Enable Communities and Local Government (CLG) to assess local authority performance and take an overview nationally of the achievements of Supporting People – particularly to demonstrate the value of the programme to the Treasury

The difficulty in designing a national approach that meets these different needs lies in deciding where to allow freedom for services and authorities to do things in their own way, and where to define from the centre how things should be done.

The advantage of freedom is that it allows for creativity, local ownership and tailoring approaches to local needs. The advantage of defining things from the centre is creating consistency which allows for comparison and aggregation of data and avoids complexity.

There were particular concerns from service providers that the imposition of a national approach to measuring outcomes at service level could undermine the initiatives of providers, which were already delivering considerable benefits. But there was also concern that without a national approach, local

authorities would all develop their own frameworks, creating an unmanageable web of monitoring demands for providers working in more than one authority.

Working towards a shared approach

Despite all the fears and concerns, a shared framework did emerge. It was the product of a number of different strands of work:-

1. The London Housing Foundation submission to the CLG in response to its original consultation paper - This identified the different needs of the CLG, local authorities and service providers and made recommendations as to how they should be met. It focussed particularly on the needs of service providers and what the Foundation has learnt through its Impact through Outcomes Programme
2. The CLG working group on outcomes which identified the high level outcomes for the programme and developed and piloted a national outcomes form for services.
3. A pilot project in Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham, initiated by the London Housing Foundation in order to develop a practical outcomes approach for commissioners and service providers at a local level.

These strands have come together to create a coherent framework which currently has the backing of CLG, and the majority of local authorities and service providers – all of whom see it as addressing their needs and avoiding the worst of their concerns. In London, 27 of the 33 local authorities have signed up to the approach and nationally 124 of 128 authorities responding to a CLG survey indicated that they were signed up.

The national framework

The framework consists of 4 elements:-

- 1) A high level set of outcomes
- 2) A national outcomes monitoring form
- 3) A basket of additional indicators
- 4) Distance travelled tools for service providers

A high level set of outcomes

The CLG working group defined the high level outcomes for the Supporting People programme as being to enable clients to:-

- Have economic well-being
- Enjoy and achieve
- Be healthy

- Stay safe
- Make a positive contribution

The CLG deliberately chose the same high level outcomes as are used for the Every Child Matters Programme in order to move in the direction of consistency across government departments and initiatives. This high level set of outcomes has provided an overarching framework for the programme.

A national outcomes monitoring form

The CLG working group developed two (very similar) outcomes forms for service providers to complete – one to be completed by short-term services when the client leaves, and one which will be completed by a sample of long-term services. Each form asks for outcomes data on 14 outcomes within the five high level outcome areas described above.

Within each of the 14 outcome areas, providers are asked to report three main things:

- Whether the client needed support in that area
- If so, was the desired outcome achieved (with outcomes specified in each case)
- If not, why not (with a list of reasons covering factors to do with the client, the service or external circumstances)

The data will be held on a web-based system and will be made available to the CLG, local authorities and providers. It will serve two primary purposes:-

- a) it will give CLG national data on the achievements of the Supporting People programme
- b) It will provide local authorities with data on the outcomes of their SP programme overall and on individual services - and benchmark with data for similar services with the same primary client groups - for contract monitoring

The data may also be used in other ways as well:-

- c) By CLG for monitoring local authority performance; outcomes for each local authority will be benchmarked against national and regional outcomes
- d) By local authorities to take an overview of the achievements of their Supporting People programme – also benchmarking, including sub-regionally or against specific local authorities with similar needs and client groups
- e) By service providers to understand and learn from their own outcomes - probably in conjunction with information collected through distance travelled outcomes tools such as the Outcomes Star
- f) For research purposes; for example to explore links between certain types of services or client groups and positive outcomes

A basket of additional indicators

The pilot study in Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham tested a wide range of outcome indicators and concluded that the information collected through the CLG form would provide everything the local authorities would require for the routine monitoring of services.

However, it emerged that there were circumstances in which an authority might want further information – for example in relation to pressure on local health services and/or if there were concerns about a service's performance. The pilot identified a small basket of additional indicators that authorities could choose from when seeking further information from services.

CLG adapted and adopted this basket for national use. By having a national basket, local authorities are saved the (somewhat laborious) work of developing meaningful indicators and providers are spared the (even more laborious) work of reporting similar information to different authorities in different ways.

Distance travelled tools for service providers

Providers will be encouraged to use distance travelled tools such as the Outcomes Star to build up a much more detailed picture than the CLG form allows of the ways in which their clients are progressing. Service providers are free to choose whichever tool best meets their needs and to develop their own tools if necessary. As well as meeting provider needs for detailed outcomes information as a basis for learning and service improvement, local authorities will be able to draw on this information as part of contract monitoring if and when they require a more detailed picture of the service's achievements

Putting the pieces together

Together these different elements add up to a national framework which;-

- provides the national data that CLG requires
- ensures consistency across local authorities together with the flexibility to gather additional information when needed, and
- enables providers to carry out detailed outcome monitoring in their own way

What does this mean for service providers?

A new form to complete

As of 31st May this year providers need to complete the short-term for all clients exiting their service and submit them quarterly. The long-term form will be completed annually on a sample of clients – the details are still in discussion. This form is expected to go live in August. Forms are completed

and submitted electronically and analysed centrally by the Centre for Housing Research in St Andrews who also already analyse the client record form.

The data will be made available to local authorities and service providers on a web-based system. Key reports will be provided for each local authority, presenting their data broken down by primary client group and service and benchmarked with national and regional outcomes. Providers will also be able to use their log-in to access their own data, and the CLG working group are exploring how this could also be benchmarked, ideally with similar service types within the same primary client group. Local authorities and service providers will also have access to their own raw data so that they can analyse it in their own way if required.

Additional national indicators to collect

Providers will also need to ensure that they are able to collect additional outcomes information on specific services from the basket of indicators on request. CLG is currently in the process of developing an excel-based spread sheet which providers will be able to use to collect this data when needed.

In the short-term, it is likely that at least some local authorities will request additional information not in the national basket as some authorities have developed their own set of indicators and it may take time for the high level agreement to adopt the national basket to filter down to staff drawing up contracts. Providers may need to take the initiative in pointing local authorities back to the principles of the national framework and the national basket of indicators.

A greater emphasis on distance travelled tools

Service providers are increasingly recognising the value of using distance travelled tools as an integral part of their work with clients. Experience has shown that the tools provide focus, structure and clarity to aid client change, and that the data they generate can help both identify service issues and good practice. It is now likely that local authorities will increasingly require that such tools are used as part of their contract conditions. The Audit Commission, which has already recognised the use of the Outcomes Star as good practice, may move further in this direction.

Looking ahead

Looking a few years into the future, providers can expect outcomes information to become part of the normal discourse about services. They are likely to be a standard part of service contracts and contract monitoring though there are no moves to link funding to outcomes. At first it is likely that the outcomes data – both from the CLG forms and providers own distance travelled tools – will be difficult to interpret. There will be concerns about accuracy and the complexity of the data will make it difficult to understand. But increasingly services will recognise which indicators are most useful and will

start to get a sense of what kinds of outcomes a certain kind of service should be achieving. In some areas benchmarks will start to emerge.

It is also possible that, whilst the national framework allows providers to choose their own outcomes tools, over time certain tools will emerge as the most favoured by providers and/or commissioners . Agencies in the homelessness field in London are already discussing the benefits of sharing distance travelled data. In the mental health sector the Mental Health Providers Forum is looking into the possibility of developing a sector-wide tool based on the Outcomes Star.

The sensitive and intelligent interpretation of outcomes data is likely to be another key challenge - making the most of the learning about successes and failures to improve services by creating a climate in which agencies feel able to be open about what they are achieving.

We believe that the outcomes framework that has been developed for the Supporting People programme is very effective in terms of balancing the need for information with the need limit bureaucracy and recognising the different requirements of central government, local government and service providers. There may now be an opportunity to share some of this learning with other government departments and to work towards creating shared frameworks for measuring outcomes across government.