

**Briefing 15/48 September 2015**

# **The Duty of Performance Improvement in Northern Ireland – Cultural Services.**

To: contacts in Northern Ireland.  
For information: contacts in England, Scotland and Wales.

Key issues  
All NI councils have a duty of performance improvement  
Performance Networks provides a ready-made model for performance management and benchmarking  
Examples of performance measures for Cultural Services

## **1. Introduction**

Part 12 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 introduces a general duty of improvement on the new councils in Northern Ireland - "A council must make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions". In discharging this duty a council must have regard to their need to improve the exercise of its functions in terms of strategic effectiveness; service quality; service availability; fairness; sustainability; efficiency; and innovation.

## **2. Cultural Services**

Cultural services can potentially include a variety of elements including arts and creativity, libraries, museums, sports, festivals and events. Each local authority may define cultural services uniquely and this might also depend upon the structure of the organisation. These services are not mandatory service but make an important contribution to the wellbeing of local communities. A substantial budget and staffing resource is allocated to cultural services and it is essential that management, councillors and the local community are able to ensure that the services provide value for money. The quality of the service and benefit to the community can only be gauged effectively if the performance of the service is managed adequately. Evidencing effective performance management of services is one of the aims of the duty introduced in the Act.

## **3. Performance Frameworks**

A performance framework will have a number of elements - local priorities identified in a corporate or annual statement; identifiable measures; a service review plan; data collection and reporting cycles; links to the budget and service planning cycle; a process for making performance information publicly available; a role for audit and scrutiny; and benchmarking activities.

APSE's Performance Networks model is a performance management and benchmarking model which works alongside the internal arrangements in place within a local authority to support performance improvement.

As with all good performance tools it is based on adequate and appropriate data. This is vital for the elements of a framework for example helping to identify and justify local priorities for action; providing relevant

performance information for service users; making sure the audit role and scrutiny role can take place; and enabling the sharing of experience and expertise to lead to improvement through benchmarking.

#### 4. Service related issues.

All services need a service plan which can identify the requirements for a service for the coming year and further into the future, set targets and explain how it fits into the wider perspective of the organisation.

There needs to be collection and analysis of data about the service to identify how well it is performing for management purposes, provide some context for those in an audit or scrutiny role to assess how well it is meeting its objectives and to keep the public informed.

The DoE has consulted on a number of existing performance indicators as the first step in establishing a set of measures for local government. These measures cover waste, economic development and planning.

##### 4.1 Cultural Services

The measures noted below are simply a list of possible examples. They are grouped under titles such as financial, external funding, facilities, satisfaction, usage, etc. it is appropriate that these elements of cultural services are tracked, and others may be added, but the individual measures themselves can be altered, added to or deleted.

Financial	<p>Subsidy per head for users</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• museums and galleries users</li> <li>• arts activity users</li> <li>• libraries users</li> <li>• sports &amp; recreation facility users</li> <li>• children’s play facility users</li> <li>• sports development users</li> </ul>
	Subsidy for all per head of population
	Net cost of service (including CEC) per head of population
	<p>Aggregate spending on venues as a % of budget</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• civic, cultural and community venues</li> <li>• sports facilities</li> <li>• libraries</li> <li>• museums and galleries</li> </ul>
	<p>Income as a % of total service income</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• civic, cultural and community venues</li> <li>• sports facilities</li> <li>• museums and galleries</li> </ul>
	<p>Operational recovery ratio</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• civic, cultural and community venues</li> <li>• sports facilities</li> <li>• museums and galleries</li> </ul>
External funding	Number of organisations financially supported by Culture department budget per head of population
	% of assisted grant/funding applications ultimately successful
	Level of external funding accessed as a % of total expenditure

Facilities	Number of facilities per 1,000 population / children <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• museums and galleries</li> <li>• arts activity</li> <li>• libraries</li> <li>• sports &amp; recreation facilities</li> <li>• children's play facilities</li> <li>• areas of parks and open spaces</li> </ul>
	Average NPFA play value score of children's playgrounds
	No. of theatrical performances at all theatres per year
Absence	% staff absence
Priority actions	% of young people at risk of offending referred to sports and recreation / arts activity services and continuing to participate
	% of sports development / arts activity services budget targeted to high priority areas
	% of sports development / arts activity services staff hours targeted to high priority areas
	% of sports development / arts activity services usage in high priority areas
Usage	Usage per head of population <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• museums and galleries</li> <li>• arts activities</li> <li>• libraries</li> <li>• sports &amp; recreation facilities</li> <li>• children's play</li> <li>• sports development</li> </ul>
	Usage of all per head of population
	Number of people successfully completing coaching/ teaching/ supervision courses per 1000 head of population
	% of year 6 pupils achieving Key Stage 2 in swimming
Satisfaction	% satisfaction with services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• museums and galleries users</li> <li>• arts activity users</li> <li>• libraries users</li> <li>• sports &amp; recreation facility users</li> <li>• children's play facility users</li> <li>• sports development users</li> </ul>

## 6. Cultural Services Issues

It may be that services such as parks, tourism or others are categorised as cultural services within particular local authorities and although that is important from an organisational structure perspective in terms of monitoring the service it is irrelevant. The service needs to be managed wherever it sits within the organisation.

Income from these services will go a long way to pay for provision and as funding gets tighter this will of course become more important. Nonetheless setting fees and charges at the right level to meet the ability and desire of users to pay is also vital for a sustainable service. Access to and success when bidding for grant funds is another important factor to get right.

Facilities and staff costs will be major elements in terms of the budget and so need managing effectively especially as some facilities are very expensive to maintain. Numbers of users remains fundamental to the viability of a service and maximising this is a goal of any cultural service. However there are some intangibles with these services – what is the benefit to the individual and community of a museum? How long does someone have to attend a sports class before they can be classed as ‘active’? what level of visitors should a facility receive before it can be considered viable?

## **7. Questions**

The measures noted above are needed to manage services and to keep senior managers and councillors informed of performance. The same duties now lie with managers in Northern Ireland and the model closely fits with their needs in this regard.

A number of questions arise when looking at the list of measures above:-

Q. Are these measures right for Northern Ireland?

Some of them will be appropriate and some may not. What is important is that the sector comes together to identify those measures that are correct for the new councils. The APSE model can be altered in terms of the detail whilst still providing a huge amount of comparison and trend data from over 180 local authorities in the UK as well as acting as an internal model for benchmarking in Northern Ireland

Q. Do you have the data to complete this type of template?

All councils have data, and lots of it, within the organisation – and that includes most of the data needed to complete the measures. The problem is that it needs to be formalised, recorded and made available in an easy to use format.

Q. Do you have the resources for this type of work?

The larger councils should now have the scale to manage performance effectively. Some were not in that position under the old regime but the new duty of performance improvement means this is an area of work which can no longer be avoided. Once systems and a framework are in place and a culture of effective performance management exists, performance improvement is not an additional responsibility but becomes part of the normal day job.

Q. What other factors should be considered?

It is appropriate to ask managers whether they would be able to provide the data for the indicators highlighted above. The indicators all refer to important service matters such as cost and productivity and some would argue that those who are unable to provide this type of information, are equally unable to manage that service properly.

## **8. Five next steps**

If you still have some way to go in terms of performance management data, what should you do next?

1. You should join with colleagues with similar responsibilities from other councils to identify those measures and data you will need to manage your service or to manage performance across the council corporately.
2. It is important that you begin to put systems in place which mean you can access the data you need on a regular basis.

3. The sector should take the lead on this agenda working with the Department to ensure arrangements are appropriate for councils primarily as well as meeting the Department's needs.
4. It is vital that any data collected is used. Local authorities should ensure that the senior management team, service managers, councillors and audit staff have the skills to analyse performance data.
5. Consider APSE's Performance Networks model as the tool to help you meet your responsibilities for performance improvement under the Act and instil a culture of performance management across your organisation.

## **9. Northern Ireland context**

The measures noted above are some of those used within the existing full Performance Networks model used by many local authorities in the UK. The new councils may not be in a position to collect this information for the financial year just passed from their predecessor councils. However they should have some historic performance data.

Trend data depends on having data from previous years available for comparison over time. As one of the aims of local government re-organisation was to improve services and make savings, it would be reasonable to expect that predecessor councils had information in place which could be combined to make such comparisons. This information is available from other councils in the Performance Networks database.

The DoE has said that a set of measures will be introduced for local government to aid performance improvement and benchmarking. Ideally the councils should come together and work as a sector to take this agenda forward themselves rather than let the Department lead the way. The councils should work with the Department to ensure they put in place a framework which results in manageable arrangements being in place that enable the sector to improve and learn from each other – both in Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK.

## **10. APSE Support**

APSE's Performance Networks is the largest public sector performance management and benchmarking model in the UK. It covers 14 service areas, many of which are directly applicable to the services provided by the councils in Northern Ireland.

It is an established model with 180 local authorities submitting data with a focus on sharing experience and expertise. Comparison of performance data and, more importantly, the processes that lead to good performance, helps the identification of better ways of working, improved outcomes and a sector which interacts for the benefit of all. We understand that collecting data is a pointless exercise unless it is used to improve services and inform interested parties. As such we run a series of benchmarking events to enable process benchmarking to occur.

APSE is in the process of developing new templates to sit within the existing model and one of these will cover cultural services as well as templates for services such as planning, economic development, corporate services and building control for use in Northern Ireland.

Bearing in mind the amount of work involved in establishing and developing the new councils, re-inventing the wheel in terms of performance improvement and benchmarking is not an option in Northern Ireland.

This is one of a series of briefings APSE will draw up over coming weeks addressing performance improvement in both corporate and service areas.

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