

Scrutiny Board (City Development) Performance Working Group

Meeting held on 2nd September 2009

Present:

Councillor Ralph Pryke (Chair)
Councillor Tom Murray

Others in Attendance:

Paul Maney, Head of Policy, Performance and Improvement
Fiona McAnespie, Senior Performance & Improvement Manager
Elaine Rey, Senior Project officer, Planning Policy and Improvement
Helen Franklin, Acting Head of Highways Services
Laura Nield, Scrutiny Adviser, Democratic Services

1.0 Introduction

1.1 At the July meeting of the Scrutiny Board (City Development) it was agreed *“that a working group be established to review the performance targets which have been set locally, comprising of the following Members:-*

- *Cllr R Pryke*
- *Cllr S Bentley*
- *Cllr T Murray*
- *Cllr N Taggart*

1.2 This was the first meeting of the above working group. Cllr Bentley has now stepped down from the Scrutiny Board (City Development) and Cllr Taggart was advised of the date and time of the meeting but did not attend.

2.0 Issues discussed

2.1 The chair began by explaining that Board members were concerned about the credibility of the current performance management system, as the majority of the targets appeared to be met with ease. This suggested to members that the targets were either not stretching enough, or that the right things were not being measured. Overall members were under the impression that these ‘un-challenging’ targets had been actively lobbied for by officers.

2.2 Paul Maney proceeded to explain to members the process by which targets were agreed. Within the Local Area Agreement there are 35 indicators agreed with the Government. Performance against these affects the amount of funding allocated to the authority, so clearly officers are reluctant to agree to targets which are too challenging.

- 2.3 These 35 targets have to relate to the authority's strategic outcomes, as set out in the Leeds Strategic Plan, although they are chosen from a national indicator set. The Government Office also has its own priorities to take account of. Therefore, LCC officers have very little leeway when it comes to choosing the indicators or the related targets.
- 2.4 In addition to the LAA indicators, there are also those agreed with statutory city-wide partners, national indicators (some with targets and some without) and local indicators set entirely by LCC.
- 2.5 There was some discussion as to whether it would be possible to set an additional local target, higher than the nationally agreed one, but measuring the same indicator, in order to provide a more rigorous challenge to the service. Theoretically this would be possible, but in practice it is unlikely to happen as it would lead to questions from government as to why the national target had not been set higher.
- 2.6 The only other potential source of more challenging targets is those set by 'lead partners' in the Local Area Agreement. As these are not given final approval by LCC, there is the possibility that these may be set higher than officers would like. However, this could potentially be very damaging for the authority if a target were to be set unrealistically high and then missed.
- 2.7 It was pointed out that it can be quite difficult to set indicators for certain improvement priorities, as they are purposely set quite broadly, and it is therefore hard to identify one particular measure, the achievement of which would demonstrate success.
- 2.8 Officers also highlighted that one means of avoiding the suspicion of conflict of interest which sometimes accompanies the setting and measurement of targets by a local authority is to involve an external assessor. One example which was given was that of the number of 'Green Flag' parks, used as an indicator of the quality of the built environment.
- 2.9 A discussion was held around the best means of measuring progress in the complex area of climate change. This issue is complicated by the fact that the Council's own actions only account for a small amount of environmental impact. LCC has a far more important role to play in influencing partners across the city to change their behaviour.
- 2.10 Members also discussed the need to have a coordinated approach across the Council in dealing with environmental issues. It was explained that a programme board including all the accountable directors has been established, to tackle complex issues such as the airport. This was a particularly good example of the complexity of the situation, as while an expanded airport would help the city to meet its economic strategic priorities, it would have an adverse affect on those related to the environment and also could impact upon issues like traffic congestion.

- 2.11 The introduction of 'action trackers' to the performance management process should help to illuminate complex issues such as this for Members. However, this system is still very much in its infancy.
- 2.12 The example of indicator NI47 (Killed or Seriously injured casualties) was used to demonstrate to members that the measurement of targets does not just relate to annual predictions, but to a trend over a period of time. The graph presented showed that although the figures occasionally increased from one year to the next, overall there was a downward trend. Members were also shown a map with the distribution of casualties by ward. This demonstrated the complexity of presenting such data on an 'area' basis, as some parts of the city had noticeably higher rates due to the presence of major routes. However, this would clearly not necessarily be an indicator of poorer road safety.
- 2.13 Despite this, there may be some scope for presenting information around certain indicators at a local level. For example, the introduction of the new City Card should enable library usage to be recorded much more accurately.

3.0 Recommendations of the Member Working Group

- 3.1 Members were presented with a list of all targets monitored by the Scrutiny Board (City Development) including comments on how the data was collected.
- 3.2 The working group resolved that this list be presented to the full Scrutiny Board to enable board members to select a number of targets for further investigation.