



## **Performance Management Task Group**

**Final report  
March 2006**

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**Cllr Neil Nerva  
Chair of the Task Group**

**Foreword by  
Chair of the Task Group  
Cllr Neil Nerva**



The Performance Management Task Group was formed to look at how services in Brent Council are using Performance Indicators to drive forward service improvement. It did this by assessing two services the One Stop Shop and the Street-care division and how they use performance indicators within their specific areas. The group interviewed the relevant managers as well as the Deputy Leader to gain an executive perspective on the effectiveness of performance management within the authority. Our interviews were all productive and I'd like to thank all of those who participated.

Amongst the areas the Group looked at in particular were the use of local indicators; how we identify good practice elsewhere; public perception of our services and the customer satisfaction indicators that represent public perception; and the use and dissemination of information within the authority. These areas of discussion are reflected on within the recommendations that this task group have made.

Overall we were happy with the work being done to drive up the level of performance within the authority. It is clear that throughout the authority a performance management culture has taken root. We are committed to improving our service delivery. Also, I am certain that the financial stability of recent years has helped deliver these service improvements and the culture that make it possible. All of our recommendations are made within a spirit of acknowledging the real achievements of recent years.

All of that being said this Task Group represents a snap shot as we were formed in September 2005 with the determination of completing our work and report by the end of the current electoral cycle. We have achieved that aim and I'd like to thank the officers who assisted the Group's work and my fellow Councillors H.B. Patel and Noel Thompson who served on the Task Group with me.

**Task Group Membership**

The Task Group consisted of the following members:

- Cllr Neil Nerva (**Chair**)
- Cllr Harshadbhai Patel
- Cllr Noel Thompson

## **Executive Summary**

The Performance Management Task Group interviewed two service managers and the Deputy Leader of the Council. Its aim was to carry out a snapshot review of performance management within the authority.

Amongst the issues that the Task Group considered and have made recommendations on are national and locally set performance indicators; complaint handling; general service improvement and the provision of information for councillors on service issues particularly as they affect the individual Councillor's ward.

## **Recommendations**

1. The Task Group endorse the need for more local target setting and would like to look at ways that this can be achieved. The Group notes the establishment of the Local Area Agreement (LAA) which begins to develop this flexibility. However we would like to look at ways that this process of local target setting can be developed and how Councillors, both Executive and Scrutiny could be involved. We would also need to be satisfied that due to the LAA there was a commensurate reduction in net targets to be reported. Therefore we ask that the Executive work with organisations like the LGA and ALG to progressively reduce performance indicators. We also want a report on local indicators brought to a meeting of the Performance and Finance Select Committee in the 2006/7 cycle.
2. We support the direction the council is taking around developing ward profiles and assessing information at a ward level. Members would find it particularly useful for ward profiles to include information on the performance of Environment and Culture including street cleanliness, refuse collection and recycling. Ward profiles should also contain crime statistics and finally the number and nature of complaints to the council. This would allow councillors to develop priorities for their areas more effectively and should be updated at least quarterly and monthly where appropriate.
3. That all ward councillors should be provided with an initial pack of information relating to their ward covering its socio-economic profile; ethnicity, religion and educational attainment. This profile should be updated wherever possible annually.
4. That the Vital Signs report should include for each indicator a prediction by the Manager of the service of the likelihood of the target being reached categorised as High, Medium or Low.
5. That the Vital Signs should indicate the best performing authorities in London for each individual indicator.
6. We support the efforts to improve public perception of us as a local authority and would like to see a report on this issue brought to Performance and Finance Select Committee in the 2006/7 cycle.

7. We believe that External Challenge represents a useful tool for evaluating performance and support their use where appropriate.
8. We believe in the need for external contracts especially in street-care to include robust performance management criteria from the outset.

## **Background**

### **Introduction**

The Task Group aimed at carrying out an investigation into how the authority uses performance information to drive forward service improvement and whether or not we are maximising the information. The Group identified two services that it wanted to investigate as representative of the organisation. It was decided that a varied mix of services should be chosen. These were the One Stop Shop and Street-care and as a result interviews were held with the Director and Assistant Director with responsibility for these two areas.

The Task Group decided that they were determined to complete their work within the dead-line of May 2006 elections and report back to the Performance and Finance Select Committee and the Executive in the current electoral cycle. This may affect its depth and some of the recommendations therefore set out possible priorities for the new electoral cycle beginning in May 2006.

### **Context**

Creating an effective performance management process was one of Brent's six improvement priorities agreed with the Audit Commission in January 2003 following the 2002 Corporate Assessment. Since that time the authority has undertaken a fundamental overhaul of performance management arrangements. This included:

- Investigating the processes and procedures that contributed to under-performance and making changes and improvements to those services where necessary.
- Creation of a Performance Infrastructure to support performance management across the council. This includes the Improvement Board.
- Establishing a regular reporting cycle to senior management and Executive and Scrutiny members of key performance data by using a "vital signs" traffic light system.
- All senior managers have received training on performance management as part of the Senior Managers Development Programme.
- Undertaking Member led enquiries into the performance of specific PI's and reporting to the Performance and Finance Select Committee.
- Monthly and quarterly meetings with the Leader, Chief Executive and senior managers of high risk or priority services to corporately support the implementation of improvement plans.
- Departmental Performance Management has also improved.

This sustained focus on performance issues has reaped real improvements in the effectiveness of our priority services. Children's Social Services, Sports, Revenue and Benefits, and Waste Management have all shown significant improvements in their key performance measures as well as a more general increase in the quality and range of services available. Currently, 79% of our performance indicators are going up which shows the real dividends of this approach.

Three years on, it is a good time to reassess how the consideration of performance issues now informs service planning and decision-making within the Council. We wanted to know how specific service units are using performance indicators to drive forward service improvements. We also wanted to see how far a performance improvement culture has developed within the service units of the council. Finally, given the problems with public satisfaction Best Value Performance Indicators we wanted to see if we could shed some light on what we might do to help improve these indicators.

## **Background**

It is clear that all the service units have instituted internal review systems that allow them to monitor their performance and identify and address areas of weakness.

## **Environment & Culture**

Environment and Culture have a Performance and Best Value Team made up of four staff. They collate all performance information within the directorate and produce quarterly performance reports for the Environment and Culture Directors.

The Quarterly Performance Report covers:

- Vital Signs
- Comparative Performance Assessment (CPA) indicators
- Performance Service Area (PSA) indicators
- Improving Brent Action Plan Indicators
- Corporate indicators such as BV8 (which is the percentage of invoices paid on time) and BV12 (which covers staff sickness rates)
- Complaints performance
- Telephone performance
- Finance information
- Survey top line findings
- Service unit BVPI and local indicators
- Exception Report Analysis

Any area of weakness is addressed at these meetings with discussions between the Directors and relevant Service Unit Managers. Action plans and a timetable of action are prepared and the Assistant Director responsible for the Service Unit in conjunction with the Service Unit Manager works on delivering the necessary improvement of service.

## **Housing & Community Care**

It should be noted that the new Housing and Community Care department are currently continuing to run separate arms for its performance monitoring and improvement based on the original departments of Housing and Customer Services and Social Care and Health.

Housing & Customer Services have an enabling team who produce a Quarterly Report which can be found on the Intranet site and goes to their Departmental Management Team (DMT) for consideration and action. Housing & Customer Services also have monthly monitoring meetings for poor performing areas. The service has a range of indicators that covers all areas of the department and both the

service managers and monitoring team make comments on the indicators in the Quarterly Report.

The Social Care and Health arm of the department use the national performance indicators for Social Services. These are also monitored by the Departmental Management Team (DMT) on a regular basis. The Executive Lead for Social Services Cllr Fox attends the Departmental Management Team once a month. This meeting looks in detail at performance against a number of Performance Indicator's identified as critical for the department in terms of improving performance

Within the Department, a quarterly digest providing a wider range of information about its performance has been produced. This is being re-designed at present as part of the development of a new performance management framework for the department.

### **Children & Families**

Like the Housing and Community Care and the Environment and Culture Directorates Children and Families have a performance team that prepare a quarterly report on all the Best Value Performance Indicators, Local Indicators and vital signs. However, given the sensitive nature of some of the work that the Children and Families department cover and the need for up to date information means that indicators have been graded on the basis of sensitivity with some areas reported weekly; others monthly while the rest is monitored in the more standard quarterly fashion.

The weekly reports currently focus on the work carried out by the referral and assessment teams into vulnerable children. The monthly reports cover the previous month's referrals, initial and core assessments, looked after children, children on the child protection register and conferences on these children. The quarterly Key Monitoring Information is a more in depth analysis with an executive summary for each area including those covered in the weekly and monthly reports.

### **Corporate Centre/Policy and Regeneration**

All of this departmental work is brought together by the Corporate Centre who prepares the Vital Signs Report which tracks fifty seven key indicators and provides a comprehensive colour coding for all the signs of Green, Amber and Red signifying whether or not the target is being met. Where the target is not being met (Amber/Red) the relevant Director, service manager and cabinet member are all invited to outline the steps being taken to improve performance. Vital Signs is reported to the Corporate Management Team (CMT), Executive and Performance and Management Team.

Policy and Regeneration also co-ordinate the High Level Monitoring meetings where areas of concern are reported to a High Level Monitoring group that is chaired by the Leader and includes in its membership the Deputy Leader and Chief Executive. The Policy and Regeneration Unit co-ordinates the work of the Strategic Performance Group (SPG). Finally, PRU play a key role in supporting the Overview and Scrutiny function including the Performance and Finance Select Committee whose remit specifically covers performance management and improvement.

## **Other authorities**

We conducted research into how other authorities managed performance monitoring and improvement. We found that our processes were consistent with the performance of other authorities that we looked at.

### **Camden**

Camden uses a performance management report system to Executive and Overview and Scrutiny very similar to our Vital Signs. The report is pulled together by the Camden Strategy Unit. It includes both national Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI's) and locally set indicators. Like Brent each indicator is given a direction of travel and comments from service managers. Unlike Brent the Camden document specifically asks the Manager to predict the likelihood of meeting the target with categories of high, medium and low. The report also indicates the London authorities with the best performance for that indicator.

### **Westminster**

Westminster track performance very clearly from the corporate centre. A report goes monthly to their senior officer board which monitors all Performance Indicators that are failing to meet their targets as well as all major Civic projects; major financial investment and expenditure; customer and complaints statistics. All of these subjects are dealt with under themes that include Civic Renewal; Customer First; City Guardian; City Investment; Clean Streets and Education Guarantee.

These subjects are streamlined and sent for reporting to both their Executive and Overview & Scrutiny functions on a quarterly basis.

## **Specific Areas**

### **Local Indicators**

We were very impressed by the local flexibility and initiative shown by the One Stop Shop. When we interviewed the Assistant Director for the One Stop Shop, she outlined that there was no simple system of One Stop Shops in local government so therefore all indicators relating to the service have to be set locally. In fact the only national indicator that affects the One Stop Shops in BV226 which relates to money spent on Advice services and is an information only indicator.

This lack of a national framework created a challenge for the One Stop Shop. They introduced their own local indicators that were set primarily with their customers/residents in mind. These usually deal with customer service issues like the length of time it takes for somebody to be seen at the One Stop Shop and how individual complaints are dealt with. The One Stop Shop has developed a series of Service Level Agreements (SLA's) with individual service areas to formalise the co-operation between the units involved to maximise the results to the benefit of the authority to ensure that any complainant is dealt with speedily, efficiently and sympathetically. Brent may not be able to satisfy every complainant but it can always attempt to deal with every complaint quickly and efficiently.

In the same vein the Deputy Leader outlined his view that the CPA system had many positive features but felt that there needed to be a greater degree of flexibility so that local priorities could be included. Cllr Coughlin would like to see targets developed in response to public views.

Currently, some of our departments make extensive use of local indicators. The Housing and Customer Services side of Housing and Community Care have approximately 2 out of 3 of their indicators set locally. This reflects the fact that they do not believe that national indicators can adequately cover their service area and all the performance issues present. They also feel that they benefit from the flexibility that having local indicators presents. Environment and Culture have a total of three hundred and eighty indicators of which 81% are local.

Alternatively, the Adult Social Care health section of the Housing and Community Care currently uses no local indicators as they have a number of extremely important nationally set Performance Indicators which they feel adequately measures their success.

- 1. The Task Group endorse the need for more local target setting and would like to look at ways that this can be achieved. The Group notes the establishment of the Local Area Agreement (LAA) which begins to develop this flexibility. However we would like to look at ways that this process of local target setting can be developed and how Councillors, both Executive and Scrutiny could be involved. We would also need to be satisfied that due to the LAA there was a commensurate reduction in net targets to be reported. Therefore we ask that the Executive work with organisations like the LGA and ALG to progressively reduce performance indicators. We also want a report on local indicators brought to a meeting of the Performance and Finance Select Committee in the 2006/7 cycle.**

### **Information Provision**

During our interview with the Director of Street-Care the question of local provision of information was discussed. We were concerned about the lack of information provided to us about street-care performance within our individual wards. We also felt that as Ward Working is rolled out for the Borough the need exists for local ward councillors being provided with a cache of information. This would include general census information about their ward and its socio-economic profile but also direct information about street-care performance within their ward including collection rates for bins and crime figures for their ward. We would also want information about specific hot spots. Finally, we would like information for ward councillors on complaints so as to know what issues are being raised by residents within their wards. We know that these figures exist and believe that they would assist councillors in developing priorities under the ward working. We are aware that work is being done on this as part of the rolling out of ward working and believe that Overview and Scrutiny should have input as representatives of non-executive council members. This information should also be provided routinely to the Executive. We understand that the authority is currently in the process of purchasing Performance Management software. We would expect this software to assist this process of information gathering.

- 2. We support the direction the council is taking around developing ward profiles and assessing information at a ward level. Members would find it particularly useful for ward profiles to include information on the performance of Environment and Culture including street cleanliness, refuse collection and recycling. Ward profiles should also contain crime statistics and finally the number and nature of complaints to the council. This would allow councillors to develop priorities for their areas more**



**effectively and should be updated at least quarterly and monthly where appropriate.**

- 3. That all ward councillors should be provided with an initial pack of information relating to their ward covering its socio-economic profile; ethnicity, religion and educational attainment. This profile should be updated wherever possible annually.**

Relating to information the Task Group were impressed by the fact that Camden requires the Manager of each service unit to predict the likelihood of reaching the set target and to reveal the best performing authorities in London for each indicator. We believe that such information would provide the Executive and Overview and Scrutiny a far greater understanding of how well we are doing as an authority and how well we are likely to do and have an understanding of our performance compared to other London authorities. This information would also be able to form the backdrop for future research by Scrutiny on performance.

- 4. That the Vital Signs report should include for each indicator a prediction by the Manager of the service of the likelihood of the target being reached categorised as High, Medium or Low.**
- 5. That the Vital Signs should indicate the best performing authorities in London for each individual indicator.**

### **Public Perception**

The Task Group are acutely aware that public perception has not kept pace with the service improvements of recent years. The Best Value Performance Indicators that relate to public satisfaction are disappointing and are helping hold back the authority from reaching its aim of being classified as four stars under the CPA. To us this proves that performance indicators do not always indicate to the general public quality or good value. We discussed this issue with Cllr Coughlin in our interview with him and we know that consideration is being given to address it.

- 6. We support the efforts to improve public perception of us as a local authority and would like to see a report on this issue brought to Performance and Finance Select Committee in the 2006/7 cycle.**

### **External Challenge**

In our interview with Cllr Coughlin we discussed the benefit of External Challenge. The Task Group were impressed by the benefits. We also know that other authorities such as Westminster have successfully used External Challenge to improve performance. For example, Westminster invited a CPA-type Peer Review halfway between official inspections. Brent has a history of using External Challenges – finance, libraries, culture as well as amongst the services that have previously benefited from the use of Peer Reviews/External Challenges. We should be making use of External Challenge where possible. We believe that such reviews would help identify means of improving individual service areas. We feel that our membership of the West London Alliance (WLA) gives us access to officer and member groups that could help us with External Challenges. Our geographical proximity to Camden and Westminster also provides possible opportunities for effective Peer reviews. There may also be a place for internal Peer reviews.

- 7. We believe that External Challenge represents a useful tool for evaluating performance and support their use where appropriate.**

### **Contractors**

During our interview with the Director of Street-care we discussed the performance of external contractors and the degree to which their performance is monitored. We discussed our concerns with Cllr Coughlin as well. We accept that there are external contractors with whom we have good working relations and a well run and functioning contract. However, we are also concerned about the street-care contracts especially parking. We feel that a need exists for clear performance criteria being included in the contract from the outset and for the contract to be monitored carefully.

- 8. We believe in the need for external contracts especially in street-care to include robust performance management criteria from the outset.**

### **Overview & Scrutiny**

During our interview with the Deputy Leader we discussed the relationship between the Executive and Overview and Scrutiny. We were satisfied with the Deputy Leader's commitment to good working relations between the Executive and Overview & Scrutiny. We understand that a review of the Overview and Scrutiny function will take place after May 2006 especially the Scrutiny Panels. We welcome that review.

We also understand that the Executive have commissioned the Policy and Regeneration Unit to prepare a report on managing performance within our partnerships. We look forward to this work coming to fruition.