

Local Performance Framework FAQs

National Indicators

- 1. *Will the reduction in Performance Indicators mean there is a reduction in the amount of data that Government and inspectorates collect from Local Authorities?***

The National Indicator Set will be the only set of indicators on which central Government will performance monitor local government. From April 2008, all other sets of indicators, including Best Value Performance Indicators in England for local authorities and other Performance Assessment Framework indicators, will be abolished.

Government (to inform national finance, resource and policy making decisions) and inspectorates (to inform inspection and assessments) will still need to utilise available information to inform judgments.

However the Government is committed to reducing the wider information burden on local authorities, beyond the new performance framework, including ensuring the totality of such information requests is limited and aligned to the principle of "report once used many times".

We will also be developing a gatekeeper mechanism to prevent an increase in the number of indicators in the future and control the overall data burden on Local Authorities.

- 2. *Are there any significant changes to the National Indicator set following the consultation period and the February update?***

Following the consultation on the definitions for the national indicator set, the Government has decided to make the following changes:

- To delete NI 31 Re-offending rate of registered sex offenders as it has not proved possible to develop an effective measurement for progress in this area. This is still a top priority for Government and we will consider whether a workable measure could be developed in the future.

- To add a new indicator; NI 199 Children and young people's satisfaction with parks and play areas (for introduction from 2009/10) Following the announcement of a substantial investment in play backed by a play strategy in the Children's Plan.

The total number of national indicators therefore remains at **198**.

- 3. *How long will this set of indicators be in place/will you be changing the indicator set frequently?***

The indicator set is drawn from the PSAs and DSOs that have been agreed for the CSR07 period. We do not expect these to change during that time. They will be reviewed as part of the next Spending Review.

4. How is equality and diversity taken into account in the national indicator set?

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.

5. How can I find more information on specific indicators?

The Performance Information Team (PI Team) at the Audit Commission will continue to provide advice and guidance to local authorities and their partners on the interpretation of the definitions for the national indicators. Information about what support the team provides and how to contact them can be found at: <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/performance/>

6. What is the difference between the 35 LAA targets and the 198 indicators?

The key differences are that

- **A specific stretching target** will need to be agreed for each of the up to 35 indicators chosen in the LAA. The new **statutory duties** to co-operate and have regard apply to the up to 35 (and any local targets included in the LAA);
- The LAA targets will be a central focus for the CAA;
- **Reward – the up to 35** LAA targets will be eligible for Performance Reward Grant (the precise amounts payable will depend upon performance).

CAA will cover performance in relation to the 198 indicators in the National Indicator Set.

7. Do we have a precise date for issue of the final National Indicator Set technical guidance?

We published the final Handbook on technical guidance on 1 April 2008, which includes the definitions for all the indicators that will be introduced from April 2008.

8. Which are the National Indicator Set indicators that can actually be used in 2008?

A small number of definitions have been deferred to 09/10. Work will continue on development of those indicators that will be deferred, with a consultation exercise on the technical definitions anticipated to take place in Summer 2008. All of the National Indicator Set can be included in the LAA (with the exception of the statutory education and early years targets), including those which will be deferred. Partners can 'placeholder' a space in the LAA, and introduce a specific target in the second year of the LAA, or they can choose to set a relevant local target in the first year.

9. Which indicators will be deferred to 2009/10?

The introduction of the following indicators will be delayed until 2009/10 (together with the new play indicator, see above):

NI	Indicator
12	Refused and deferred Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) license applications leading to immigration enforcement activity
24	Satisfaction with the way the police and local council dealt with anti-social behaviour
25	Satisfaction of different groups with the way police and local council dealt with anti-social behaviour
26	Specialist support to victims of a serious sexual offence
32	Repeat incidents of domestic violence
38	Drug-related (Class A) offending rate
54	Services for disabled children
57	Children and young people's participation in high-quality PE and sport
71	Children who have run away from home/care overnight
127	Self reported experience of social care users
128	User reported measure of respect and dignity in treatment
190	Achievement in meeting standards for the control system for Animal Health

10. Should LAAs only include targets for National Indicators that need to be delivered in partnership?

LAA targets in the 'up to 35' need to be drawn from the National Indicator Set, which is the list of outcomes delivered by local government alone or in partnership. All of these can potentially delivered in partnership – although the amount of partnership working that is involved will vary between indicators and between areas.

An LAA is a powerful vehicle for delivering those things that one partner cannot do alone, but this is not to say that targets predominantly delivered by one partner do not have a place in LAAs. In fact, as the story of each place will differ, it would not be correct to automatically rule National Indicators (NIs)

in or out of an LAA using any such test. The aim is to identify the right mix of targets based on the agreed evidence base and the longer-term priorities in the Sustainable Community Strategy.

11. Where can the National Indicator set data be found?

The NIs data will be held in the Data Interchange Hub (the Hub) and can be found at www.hub.info4local.gov.uk (from w/c 7th April).

The Hub provides a secure, central data interchange for government departments and local authorities. It is a means of collating and sharing NIs and the aim is to allow performance managers in local authorities to continue to use their own systems for analysing their own indicators, and to import and export the data using the agreed standards.

A Hub Guide has been published and can be found on the CLG web site at: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/datainterchange/hub>

Local Area Agreements (LAAs)

LAA Timetable and Process

12. Is a full council meeting required to sign-off the LAA?

Whether the LAA is signed off by full council or the council executive is a matter for local discretion. Similarly, it is a matter for local discretion as to whether the full council or the executive takes on responsibility for all the other LAA functions (such as preparing, submitting and modifying an LAA). A full council meeting will be needed to decide where responsibility for these functions should fall.

Allowing local discretion on this issue reflects the fact that the long term objectives identified in the Sustainable Community Strategy should already have been subject to full council scrutiny and sign off, and that the LAA is the delivery agreement for these long term objectives. It also enables local authorities to manage their own arrangements as they see fit within the timetabling requirements set by central government. It also responds directly to feedback from the consultation on the draft statutory guidance.

13. In two-tier areas, do districts need to have signed it off too?

Technically, it is only the top tier authority which needs to approve the LAA before submitting it. However there is a clear expectation that the top tier authority will have maintained “collective consensus” for the draft LAA, particularly in relation to the agreement of the named partners (which include District authorities) for specific targets. Both District and County authorities are covered by the duty to cooperate, and so should work together in overall development of the LAA.

Individual partner authorities are responsible for agreeing particular targets in the LAA, and therefore “it will be at the discretion of the individual district councils as to whether they choose to formally adopt those targets they are signing up to, prior to the whole agreement being formally adopted by the county council on behalf of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)¹.”

14. Is early sign-off possible?

No. The Operational Guidance sets out a number of already challenging milestones that need to be met up to the June 2008 deadline for sign-off. To achieve early sign off, partnerships and Government Offices would be under immense pressure to negotiate and agree targets in a very short timescale - potentially resulting in a lesser quality end product. Therefore, it is better that areas spend this time maximising the ambition in their LAAs, and ensuring the priorities agreed as part of the LAA have been properly informed by conversations and engagement of citizens, elected members and local partners.

15. What will happen in areas undergoing restructuring?

Two options have been developed for areas undergoing restructuring of which only one will be appropriate for each area. This is to ensure that there is a clear way forward for each individual authority undergoing restructuring. The appropriate option will be taken forward by the GO with the individual authorities. The options are:

- For new County Unitaries - A single LAA is negotiated for the existing geographical area for 3 years (2008-2011) as this area will not change from 2009-10.
- For new District Unitaries/Split County Unitaries - A single LAA is negotiated with the County covering the existing geographical area for one year (2008-2009). From 2009-10, the new counties/districts will have two separate two-year LAAs covering the new geographical areas.

16. What are ‘negotiating champions’?

There have been 27 areas identified in which we anticipate LAA negotiations will be most complex. This could be for a variety of reasons, including competing pressures from Whitehall, and is not indicative of the area performing poorly. All of the core cities were included for instance. In these areas Senior Whitehall Champions will help bring a collective Government perspective to negotiations, working alongside the Government Office.

17. What does the template in the operational guidance mean when it asks for ‘lead partners’ in relation to each of the 35 targets?

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (LGPIH Act 2007) sets out a list of over 20 authorities who are termed ‘named partners’

¹ Draft Statutory Guidance (4.15)

and who are under a duty to co-operate towards the overall development of the LAA. Those partners who sign up to a specific target will also be covered by the duty to have regard in relation to that particular target².

We would expect the LSP as a whole to want to maintain collective accountability for the delivery of the LAA. But for each target, the local partnership needs to make clear which of the 'partner authorities' have specifically agreed to sign up to it because once they are signed up, the duty to 'have regard' to the target in the exercise of their functions applies. This does not prevent those who are *not* partner authorities (e.g. the third sector) from signing up to a particular target, although the duty to have regard cannot apply to them – indeed such partners can also be included on the template.

These, together with the relevant 'partner authorities' are the 'lead partner(s)' referred to in the template.

Local partnerships may wish to make clear which of these partners is the main partner who will co-ordinate delivery – but there is no legal requirement to do so.

In coming to a view on which targets to sign up to, partners will want to refer to the draft statutory guidance 'Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities', which sets out the kinds of activities expected in relation to 'having regard' to a target (such as aligning budgeting and performance management processes). Partners will want to note however that the guidance is draft and that final guidance will be published in due course.

We would expect the CAA to explore, on the basis of the evidence, whether key partners are signed up to those targets most relevant for delivering the key outcomes in the LAA.

18. Is there a list of 'key dates' for LAA negotiations?

Date	Action
30 May	Responsible authorities to submit their draft agreement to Government Office
6 June	LAAs to be submitted to Secretary of State, CLG, and subsequently cleared through Cabinet Committee
30 June (provisional)	Secretary of State announces approved LAAs.

19. Is there a list of 'key dates' for MAA work?

Date	Action
End March	Partnerships submit proposals to CLG
Early May	Government respond on asks

² See section 104 of the LGPIH Act 2007

End May	MAAs submitted to Government
End-June	Secretary of State announces approved MAAs.

Local Indicators

20. What is the difference between the 'up to 35' and local targets?

In legal terms, the distinction between the 'up to 35' and the local targets are the circumstances under which they may be amended. Targets that have been designated by the Secretary of State (the 'up to 35') may not be altered without the involvement of all partners signed up to the target and the agreement of the Secretary of State. By contrast non-designated targets ('local targets') may be amended or dropped without the approval of the Secretary of State – with only the agreement of the relevant partner authorities and having consulted those who have agreed to help deliver the target on a voluntary basis. Such changes will however need to be published in line with section 113 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

Local targets will not be reported on to central government, but they will be of key importance locally and carry the same legal weight, i.e. partner authorities and the responsible authority will be required to have regard, in the exercise of their functions, to those which they have signed up to help deliver. Progress towards meeting local targets will be taken into account as part of the Comprehensive Area Assessment.

21. Will local targets only have legal force (i.e. the duty to have regard) if they are linked to the National Indicator Set?

No. The duty to have regard applies to all local targets, whatever their origin.

22. Will an LAA with many local targets be regarded as more ambitious than one with few or no local targets?

The ability to have local indicators and targets is intended to allow LSPs to develop an LAA that covers the full breadth of the ambition in its SCS. This may even involve 'plugging gaps' or extending the definitions in the National Indicator Set. There is however no optimum number of local indicators (National Indicator Set or otherwise) from the Government's perspective.

The answer to this question is the same for designated **and** local targets, in that the selection of either should flow from the story of place in the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) (and the negotiation of LAAs with the Government). In some cases, a tighter, more focused LAA, prioritised to lever real changes in delivery, is as much a sign of ambition as a wide-ranging LAA. It depends on what a particular place needs, and on capacity.

A better measure of ambition is the outcomes identified in the SCS (and LAA), and the willingness of an LSP to tackle the harder things which matter most to local people. An LSP must obviously be effective at translating its ambition into measurable indicators, but the source of these indicators is not the critical

factor – it matters more that they are the right indicators to help understand and manage their performance.

23. When, prior to June sign-off, do local targets have to be agreed?

While it is possible for the LSP to add or change non-designated local targets at any time, (except during the first month after approval of the LAA or approval of a revision proposal which includes local targets³), the initial set of local targets still need to be included as part of the LAA to be signed-off in June 2008. The Secretary of State will take into account how local targets complement the designated targets in deciding whether to sign-off the LAA; the choice of local targets (and the willingness of the LSP to use its duty to cooperate) are a key part of the story of place in the LAA.

Target Setting

24. Do targets need to be set for each of the 3 years of the LAA?

Yes, targets should be set over a 3-year trajectory period with a target for each year of the LAA. This is with the exception of those indicators which are only being introduced from 2009-10, or new indicators where there is no baseline or suitable local information. Government Offices will be able to provide further advice.

25. Where there are new indicators in the National Indicator Set, will CLG be expecting all targets to be set by June or will there be some flexibility to establish the baseline and set the target at a later date?

Government Offices will be able to provide advice on a case by case basis, and the amount of flexibility will be subject to negotiations.

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 before they do so.

Alternatively they could decide to set a target of a certain % increase over baseline, informed by local source of information, and to confirm the baseline at the annual review.

26. What will happen if there are significantly fewer than 35 targets in the LAA?

The number of targets should reflect the evidence base of the local area. Areas can have fewer than 35 targets if that represents a cohesive package and reflects negotiations.

27. To what extent can targets be changed within the 3 year period of the LAA?

³ See section 110(3) of the LGPIH Act 2007

As a matter of policy, one or more designated targets (e.g. those in the 'up to 35') may exceptionally be exchanged for others, although only through negotiations at the annual review. This is to allow sufficient flexibility to react to changing circumstances in exceptional cases within the 3 year period of the LAA. The Secretary of State will however of course consider each request on its own merits.

28. What about targets agreed through LAA negotiations which conflict with what LSPs have in local strategies which have been signed off by the end of March e.g. community safety plans?

We would expect the LAA negotiations to take account of this. However, as the 'signed-up' partner authorities have a duty to have regard to relevant targets, LSP partners would be expected to review/revisit existing commitments if necessary, including aligning relevant performance frameworks.

29. Where an area already has a target for 2010/11 that has been agreed with Government in a local plan, will this be the LAA target? Or will partners be expected to stretch beyond this already agreed target because LAA targets are supposed to be challenging and ambitious?

Where Government has already agreed a target relating to one of the up to 35 improvement targets that finishes in 2010/11, that will be an important starting point for negotiations. GOs and areas will wish to discuss in the light of any emerging evidence, whether a target remains suitably challenging.

30. I am considering including a Place Survey indicator in my LAA, but the data is only available every 2 years. How will this work?

Subject to continuing piloting work, it is intended that the first Place Survey will be run in Autumn 2008. The data from this will be available to local authorities for their own area by around Christmas, and nationally benchmarked, weighted data available by March 2009. This data will provide the baseline for the years 09/10 and 10/11 of the LAA. The next survey will be run in autumn 2010, with the final weighted data being available by March 2011. This data will generate the final performance figure for this LAA period.

31. What about non-survey years?

As part of agreeing the LAA, the GO and local partnership will need to agree a mechanism for gauging direction of travel in the non-survey year. There is no single prescribed way of doing this, but partnerships will need to determine a satisfactory method to be agreed with the GO. As was suggested in the Place Survey consultation, this could be by using non-survey data sources (such as crime data or street cleanliness) or perception measures collected by qualitative research (such as focus groups). Alternatively partnerships may prefer to run the whole survey annually or a 'mini' survey in the 'non-place survey' year – although there would be no requirement to do this.

32. What are the statistical issues regarding target setting for the Place Survey indicators?

When setting targets, it is very important to consider confidence intervals, as well as the precise sample size, any non-response bias, and the baseline levels. Whatever the methodology used, the final figure achieved through social research always comes with a 'confidence interval' – meaning that the data is accurate to a level of plus or minus a certain percentage. This position can be complicated by the lack of baseline data. Where this happens areas should agree a level of improvement based upon an informed reading of the evidence that has lead partners to see this as a key priority or once baseline data is available after the first survey. Once the baseline is obtained the final target level can then be calculated and recorded. The standard approach we propose is that whatever target is set, it should exceed the upper limit of the confidence interval of the baseline. For these reasons it is best to consult a statistician or researcher before setting targets.

33. *In the case of targets aimed at narrowing gaps, will the guidance enable us to set relative performance targets at below administrative area level?*

Guidance is clear that targets can be set for areas smaller than administrative areas, but this is not the only way of dealing with narrowing the gap ambitions. Targets could be set at higher spatial levels but activity focussed on particular areas or groups. If a target is set for areas smaller than area for which data is reported in the national indicator set, the partnership will have to report data for both spatial levels.

34. *Can we set a target that has more than one spatial aspect to it? i.e. can we set a Target around NI112 to reduce under 18 conception rates in district X & Y & Z only?*

Yes – and this will only count as one target out of the 35. The same can be said of targets which are set in respect of particular client groups. However, performance will also have to be reported at the uppermost level for the purposes of the National Indicator Set in order to ensure that overall performance is not deteriorating.

35. *Can a sub regional target be included in an LAA?*

Where data for an indicator in the National Indicator Set is only available at a sub regional rather than area level (e.g. for some areas NI 167 congestion) areas can include them as part of the set of 35 LAA designated targets.

36. *Is it possible to set a target which is expressed in relation to another target (e.g. RSS)?*

Yes, it is open to areas to agree such a target through negotiations. Such a target could however be subject to variation throughout the course of the LAA, and negotiating parties should take this risk into account.

Area Based Grant

37. When will we get final clarification of the Area Based Grant (ABG) mechanism?

Guidance on the Area Based Grant is available on the CLG website at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/areabasedgrantguidance>

38. Will flexible use of ABG in 2008/09 count as 'more ambitious' than the LSPs who are planning to allocate ABG in a similar way to 2007/08 budgets, and who are not planning to take advantage of the removal of ring-fencing in 2008/09?

Area Based Grant is a non-ringfenced general grant as such its use will not be directly monitored. It is up to local authorities to decide how best to use the totality of their non-ringfenced general grant (Revenue Support Grant and Area Based Grant) in support of local, regional and national priorities. Local authorities' outcomes will only be measured via the National Indicator Set and their LAA targets.

Performance Review & Assessment

39. What are the roles of GOs and Inspectorates in reviewing and assessing performance?

The roles of GOs and Inspectorates was set out in the Operational Guidance and joint inspectorate consultation on Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) in November 2007. We expect to publish further details on this in the summer, drawing on the findings from consultation.

40. How will Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) work in 2008-09?

The Audit Commission's approach to CPA for 2007-08 and 2008-09 is aimed at beginning a smooth transition to the new CAA. From April 2009, the current CPA will be replaced with a CAA that will focus more on citizens' experiences and perspectives. Inspection and assessment in 2008-09 as in previous years will continue to provide stimulus for improvement. They will also provide evidence to inform initial CAA judgements; and the first LAA Annual Review.

41. What is happening with other inspections from 2008-09?

CAA will replace CPA for local authorities and most other rolling programmes of inspection from April 2009. This means, for instance, that Corporate Assessments and Joint Area Reviews (JARs) will end after 2008-09, when their current three-year inspection programmes will be completed. The inspectorates set out their combined proposals for assessment and inspection in 2008-09 in their November 2007 consultation paper on CAA. The Audit Commission's consultation on the proposed CPA framework for 2008 for single tier and county councils closes on 11 April 2008. Details are available

from the Audit Commission website at <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/reports/NATIONAL-REPORT.asp?CategoryID=&ProdID=D76B2883-A3E8-456a-B996-A83006C03B1D&SectionID=sect1>

42. What other action is being taken to ensure LAA delivery is on track?

The National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy provides a robust framework for aligning central and local government improvement support. The Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships (RIEPs) have a pivotal role in delivery support arrangements. Stronger RIEPs – benefiting from £185m investment Government is making – will be expected to take on a proactive role in raising performance across a range of improvement issues. GOs will maintain strong links with RIEPs to ensure that agreed, co-ordinated and appropriate support is provided where appropriate.

43. What action will be taken in cases of under-performance?

Responses to under-performance will vary, according to the severity and importance of the issue. Improvement action will be proportionate, and reflect local context and performance, as well as where the most efficient and effective sources for support are located. In many cases support will come from within the local sector itself. The aim is to build up arrangements for earlier, more effective improvement action that can prevent serious failure arising. Government retains its powers to intervene in cases where there is critical or sustained under-performance.

44. How will the 198 Performance Indicators be reported through the CAA? And at what intervals?

Indicators will be reported at the periods specified in the technical definitions for each. CAA will cover performance in relation to the measures included in the National Indicator Set alongside other judgements of performance and prospects for delivery in an area.

45. How will CAA work in practice?

The CAA is being developed jointly by the local public services inspectorates. More details are available from the Audit Commission website. It is intended to bring together assessments of performance across each local area and will apply to anything done by local authorities acting alone or in partnership. The CAA will place particular emphasis on delivery against identified priorities for the local area (including both the national improvement targets agreed and any locally set targets). Unlike the current CPA it will be focused more on delivery of outcomes rather than the performance of individual institutions. It will also place more emphasis on citizens' experiences and perspectives.

CAA will cover:

- performance in relation to indicators in the National Indicator Set;
- the use of resources at each local public body (e.g. local authority, fire and rescue authority, PCT, police authority);
- the rate at which authorities (fire and rescue and local authorities) performance is improving; and

- the prospects for achieving priority outcomes in the area.

The inspectorates are currently analysing the responses to their first CAA consultation and the first wave of action learning. They will be consulting further on CAA methodology in the summer. The first judgements under CAA are likely to be reported in Autumn 2009.

46. Isn't CAA going to be at least as burdensome as CPA?

No. From April 2009 CAA will replace CPA, and the majority of existing rolling programmes of inspection will also cease during 2008-09.

The administrative impact of inspection and regulation is a prime consideration in the development of the new CAA framework. By working more closely in partnership the inspectorates will deliver more effective independent assessment in a way that is less intrusive than current methods. Inspectorates will draw as much as possible on existing information and the information that local public bodies use to manage their own performance. Information will be shared to avoid multiple requests for the same information. Most inspection activity will be targeted according to risk and will be co-ordinated between inspectorates.

Demonstration Areas

47. What are LAA Demonstration Areas?

These are 12 Local Strategic Partnerships who are working with Government Offices, Departments and Ministers to explore through a series of theme based workshops what can be done collectively to help raise the bar in delivering ambitious LAAs, identify systemic blockages that get in the way of delivery and identify possible ways forward.

48. Which Partnerships have been selected?

Tees Valley, Sunderland, Leeds, Manchester, Coventry, Leicester, Nottingham, Essex, Portsmouth, Cornwall, Westminster and Lambeth.

49. How and why were these Partnerships selected?

They were selected to provide a balance of partnerships - a mixture of all regions, unitary/upper tier, political leadership, urban/rural, and levels of performance. They were selected to enable us to draw on the learning from a range of different authorities and Partnerships including those which have a complex set of issues to resolve or are likely to be of strategic interest for a number of national priorities (core cities).

50. Are LAA Demonstration Areas about enabling measures?

The Local Government Performance Framework and the radical extension of freedoms from centrally set targets will help to remove many barriers currently faced by local areas. As such the LAA Demonstration Areas will not be

establishing a new process for submitting and considering proposals for further freedoms. However, where systemic issues continue to block delivery of LAAs these will be explored. Participants will work together to agree where there are local solutions or where Whitehall might need to change its approach.

51. Does this mean Ministers will be interfering in negotiations in these areas?

No. This is about identifying key issues to enable negotiations to be successful. Ministers will be keen though to continue to engage with Partnerships following discussions at the workshops to explore how issues are being taken forward.

52. How will the learning be disseminated?

We will work with the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) and Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships to ensure that the learning is disseminated as widely and as quickly as possible.

Multi- Area Agreements (MAAs)

53. Does the Government expect all local authorities to develop MAAs?

MAAs are voluntary. It is up to individual areas to decide whether an MAA would add value to existing partnership working. Geographic coverage should, as far as possible, be based on functional economic areas and we will expect MAAs to consider the key policies relating to economic prosperity.

54. Do MAAs have to only cover economic development?

The overall objective of MAAs is to facilitate the delivery of improved economic prosperity. However, we have stated that MAAs for other objectives will not be ruled out. Sub-regions that are interested in developing MAAs for other objectives should have early conversations with their GO.

55. How will the performance of MAAs be assessed?

The performance of local authorities will be assessed through the local performance framework and the CAA. The CAA will take account of sub-regional outcomes delivered through MAA partnerships.

56. How will underperformance be dealt with in MAAs?

We are exploring the mechanisms to deal with underperformance, but these will be in line with the Government's general commitments on intervention set out in the Local Government White Paper in 2006.

57. What types of target can be included in an MAA?

There are three categories of target which could feature in an MAA:

- targets drawn from the National Indicator Set which the MAA partnership and Government have agreed through negotiation should be designated, (i.e. part of the 'up to 35' designated targets) and which will therefore feature in the constituent LAAs as well as in the MAA. As they are part of the LAA, these targets would automatically be subject to the statutory duties which apply to LAAs;
- targets drawn from the National Indicator Set which are not designated, i.e. do not count towards the 'up to 35'. These could either be purely voluntary, sub-regional targets that would only feature in the MAA, or feature in the constituent LAAs as local targets as well as in the MAA. Only targets included in the LAA would be subject to the statutory duties to co-operate and have regard; and
- targets which are not drawn from the National Indicator Set (e.g. GVA, population). These could also be purely voluntary, sub-regional targets that would only feature in the MAA, or could feature in the constituent LAAs as local targets as well as in the MAA. If they featured in the MAA only, they would therefore not be subject to the statutory duties to co-operate and have regard.

58. Will partners under the duty to co-operate under LAAs, be under the same duty for MAAs?

As MAAs do not have a legislative basis there is no legal duty on partners to co-operate (unless the target is also included in the LAA, where the duty would apply to those partners signed up to have regard to it at the local authority level). However, there is the expectation that key public sector organisations, such as the RDAs, Learning and Skills Council and Jobcentre Plus should be involved in MAAs.

59. What support is available to sub-regions looking to develop an MAA?

Government Offices will be a key source of support for sub-regions and they will closely involve CLG and other Government departments during the negotiations. Regional Efficiency and Investment Partnerships and Neighbourhood Renewal Advisors will also be a source of help and support. We have also a research contract to assess the first year of MAAs and offer practical support to sub-regions over the coming months. Other organisations like LGA and Core Cities will also be a source of relevant expertise.

60. Who will ultimately agree and sign off an MAA? Will districts be co-signatories?

MAAs will be signed off by all the local authority participants (including shire districts in two-tier areas) and CLG Ministers on behalf of Government. Where other partners, such as the RDA, or private or voluntary sector partners, have agreed to make some contribution towards achieving the outcomes set out in an MAA, they should also be co-signatories.

61. We originally indicated that we were aiming to complete our MAA by June 2008, but what if our sub-region can't reach an agreement by June 2008?

June 2008 is the date for signing off the first wave of MAAs. It is not a cut-off date for everyone. Whilst there are several partnerships who we believe are on track for this date, we would rather have a later date partners are signed up to and is deliverable, than an MAA signed in June that was not robust.

62. We want to include a target within the MAA, but Government wants it to be designated within an LAA.

Where an MAA is likely to be ready for sign off by June, Departments may not see a need to press for MAA targets to be designated targets in LAAs as well. This is a matter to discuss as part of local negotiations with the Government Office.

Where there may be doubts about whether an MAA will be signed off in June, Departments may therefore have legitimate concerns about the ability of a partnership to collectively deliver against their national priorities. In such cases Departments may view a designated target as important for this round of LAAs.

63. Can we include targets in an LAA and then move to MAAs when our MAA is ready?

It is possible for partners to move any designated targets in the LAA across to the MAA at the first available opportunity (i.e. 'un-designating' them). This is most likely to be at the time of LAA annual review, although partners can choose to prepare and submit to the Secretary of State a revision proposal in line with section 111 of the LGPIH Act at any time.

64. What is the Government going to offer areas that take part in MAAs?

MAAs are individually negotiated agreements reflecting the specific priorities of that sub-region. Central Government will respond to proposals and any requests for change from sub-regions on a case-by-case basis, based on the particular circumstances of that area.

65. As this is a CLG policy are other Government Departments bought in?

Government is committed to delivering on ambitious MAAs in the short and medium term as set out in the review of sub-regional economic development and regeneration (SNR). Apart from CLG other Government Departments are involved in MAA negotiations.

66. How is the CLG taking MAA negotiations forward?

Draft proposals from sub-regions are expected by the end of March. We are then planning to negotiate MAA requests through bi-lateral discussions between CLG and the relevant department around specific themes which are common for a number of MAAs and where appropriate during senior level workshops.

In both cases the purpose of these discussions is to see what can be agreed, what needs further work and in those cases where agreement is not possible to look for alternative mechanisms to deliver what the partnership needs to deliver the sub-regions outcomes. We would expect to let sub-regions know what requests in principle will be deliverable in 2008, by the end of April, though some detailed work may continue throughout May.

National Improvement and Efficiency

67. What is the role of Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships (RIEPs) in the new framework?

RIEPs are collections of councils and partners, they are member led and operate on a regional and sub regional level to provide support for improving services and delivering value for money. RIEPs will also act as a hub for councils and partnerships to have a single conversation around their improvement needs and will be important in ensuring councils and partnerships access the right support at the right time. RIEPs have developed Regional Improvement and Efficiency Strategies which outline support for councils and partnerships over the spending review period to deliver ambitious LAAs and value for money.

68. Will the funding being channelled through the National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy (NIES) and specifically through RIEPs and the national improvement bodies such as the IDeA just be invested in the capability to deliver LAAs, and specifically the "up to 35"?

LAAs will define the priorities for improvement. In prioritising resources, RIEPs will want to consider carefully the priorities for improvement emerging from LAA negotiations and cross-cutting themes like– meeting the 3% efficiency target, economic growth, community empowerment and increased innovation. Funding of £384m comprising revenue support grant top slice (RSG), and Communities and Local Government support will be available to support these priorities, as well as performance issues that reflect the different needs and make up of the region. This consists of approximately £114m of RSG top slice and £270m to support improvement and meet ambitious efficiency targets. RIEPs will provide a range of common and specialist support including peer mentoring, expert advice, action learning, learning networks, access to training, such as leadership, partnership working and performance management.

Over the course of 08/09, we are looking to build stronger strategic arrangements for allocating combined Government and LGA resources from 2009/10. Our aim is to bring together RIEP representatives, the LGA and central government departments in an effective governance arrangement that will support a stronger, more strategic commissioning of support, based on the needs of the sector and partnerships, with the aim of having in place a more effective mechanism for allocating combined resources from 2009/10. Our aim, as set out in the Prospectus is to have new governance arrangements in place for early Spring 2009.

69. What if a Department signs up to the NIES, but it doesn't demonstrate this commitment through its actions?

We expect all Departments to look carefully at how they align their improvement support behind the new local performance framework. How this is taken forward by each Department will depend on the nature of the current arrangements Departments have in place and the ability of the RIEPs and the sectors own improvement bodies to respond to an increasing range of improvement issues. The NIES sets out an overarching commitment to making it easier for councils and their partners to access the right support at the right time. It includes a commitment that no new central or local improvement support bodies or new programmes will be created without prior consultation through central and local partnerships. The NIES Prospectus we published in March 2008 builds on that pledge, by drawing together comprehensively the improvement support available from central and local government to help local partnerships deliver excellent services.

Reducing Burdens

70. What is central government doing in regard to reducing data burdens?

In line with commitments made in the LGWP and CSR07, we are reminding Departments of their obligations to reduce data burdens. We are agreeing a process with departments to identify candidates for burden reduction and to include a challenge from local government as a key part of this process.

71. How is this being achieved?

Departments initially will have to review all their data streams. The scale of the task of analysing data-streams will vary for each department. However, departments need to make a start as soon as possible. We have devised a methodology for departments to employ based on an approach developed by the Information Centre, within the Department of Health to review social care data collections.

This includes a single set of criteria against which departments should assess their data collections outside of the indicator set. There is a presumption on departments that they will cease collections unless there is a clear reason for keeping them. Department's findings will then be scrutinised/challenged by insight groups involving local authority practitioners.

Departments are expected to report their progress to the Reducing Burdens Steering Group being coordinated by CLG.

72. When will this be achieved?

All Departments have committed to making at least a 20% reduction in data returns by April 2009 and at least 30% by 2010. We would expect Departments to publish their initial identification of burden reduction candidates in Autumn 2008. Alongside this, departments should also be

identifying any data items which can be discontinued immediately in light of the introduction of the National Indicator Set.

73. How much reduction will be achieved?

We are looking to achieve at least a 20% reduction in the number of data items to be collected by April 2009, as a stepping stone to the Government's commitment to reduce by 30% by 2010 the total data reporting burden that central departments and their agencies request from the front line (announced at CSR).