

HSC/LGP MEETING 6 NOV 2007

New LAAs

Background

LAAs have been piloted with all 150 top tier LAs in England during 2005-7. From 2008 a new round of LAAs will be agreed for all top-tier authorities. In two-tier areas district councils will work with counties to draw up an LAA.

LACORS has provided a number of briefing documents on LAAs for regulatory services and is working with IDeA and LGA to support the development of new LAAs.

LACORS' research into the first two rounds of LAAs suggests that in general regulatory services have experienced difficulty in engaging with them. This difficulty tends to be greater for those services provided at district level.

New LAAs

New LAAs are expected to strike a balance between local vision and performance improvement, in tune with the government's commitment in the 2006 White Paper *Strong and Prosperous Communities* to build a new relationship with local government, a cornerstone of which will be greater local freedom.

New LAAs will see all local resources pooled and funding will not be ringfenced.

Each LAA will include:

- 17 statutory education/early years indicators.
- Up to 35 targets drawn from the new national indicator set of 198, negotiated with Regional Government Offices and agreed with central government.
- Locally agreed targets which will have the same status as those above but which will not require reporting to central government.

The Government will require specific targets in relation to the 17+35 indicators. These will need to be measurable, timebound improvements. There will be no performance management process for LAs outside the LAA targets. Nevertheless LAAs will not remove statutory duties on regulatory services.

New LAAs will be based on the long-term vision set out in each Local Strategic Partnership's (LSP) Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS). CLG guidance on *Negotiating New Local Area Agreements* places great emphasis on the 'local story' which SCSs will tell and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill requires the LAA to be prepared with regard to the SCS.

CLG oversaw a dry run in the first half of 2007 involving 17 local partnerships, which identified a number of uncertainties. These include the future of pump priming and reward grants which play a key role in stimulating partner interest; this is linked to uncertainty over the role of 'stretch' in LAAs.

CLG envisages that areas will be negotiating with GOs on priority outcomes, based on SCSs by November 2007; will agree indicators following the publication of technical guidance on them in January 2008; and for the final sign off of targets for each indicator to take place in spring/early summer 2008.

Engaging with the LAA negotiation process

Key contacts will include GO officials, partnership managers at national regulators and existing champions among elected members, who will have a key influence on the 'story of place'.

Engagement with the negotiating process provides an opportunity to promote the inclusion in LAAs of those indicators that obviously suit the existing work of H&S. However it will probably be more effective to use engagement to assess which indicators are likely to be adopted and find ways in which regulatory services can contribute. We need to be pro-active in raising awareness among potential partners of the contribution regulatory services can make to indicators they wish to see included. For example, the various National Indicators relating to alcohol and crime offer opportunities for health and safety (through work-related violence) to work with trading standards, licensing and more politically influential partners such as the police.

What is at stake

Until the current uncertainties surrounding funding are resolved it is difficult to be precise on the financial benefits to regulatory services of direct inclusion in LAAs, but there will be benefits. However engagement in the current LAA negotiations is not just about shaping this round of LAAs. It offers a chance to influence the framework in which future LAAs are agreed. There will be some adjustment of the detail of LAAs during the three years of their life and links made now may offer opportunities to influence that adjustment as well as laying the groundwork for future agreements.

More significant however are the reputational benefits. LAAs are central government's big idea on local services and central government needs them to be seen to work. They incorporate the promotion of partnership working and are intended to refresh the relevance of local government to local communities. Involvement in LAAs therefore offers regulatory services not only access to any funding attracted by individual targets, but an opportunity to portray regulatory services as at the cutting edge of modern local service – relevant, delivery focussed, innovative and working in effective partnerships.

A failure to engage risks regulatory services being seen as part of the 'traditional role of local government' a hangover from a more bureaucratic past: the procedure-driven inspector left behind by modern developments.

LACoRS
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