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South West Regulators Forum

Local Area Agreements

A Guide for South West Local Authorities

There is already a wealth of information published on the subject of Local Area Agreements (LAAs) and the White Paper '*Strong and Prosperous Communities*'. The latest guidance is contained in the Communities and Local Government paper '*Developing the future arrangements for Local Area Agreements*' (February 2007), and *Negotiating New Local Area Agreements* (September 2007)

We are now entering a new round of LAAs which will come into effect in June 2008, alongside the new National Indicator Set, which comprises 198 indicators developed from the national priorities arising out of the Comprehensive Spending Review for 2007. The new LAAs will no longer be an add-on to the national performance frameworks under which local authorities have operated – they will replace them.

To date regulatory services have not been prominent in the negotiations leading to those LAAs. Whilst the focus has often been on the larger County and Unitary services there are plenty of opportunities for regulatory services to contribute to the agenda.

One of the problems facing us is getting around the table at the earliest possible stage to influence the shaping of the debate.

All of the County and Unitary authorities in the South West region have set up Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) (link to CLG Website) and these will be in the vanguard of delivering the new round of LAAs, usually supported by officers of the local authority. There will generally be an officer who has the delegated responsibility for co-ordinating the process, either an LSP Manager or a dedicated LAA Officer. They are your first point of contact. A list of principal contacts for the South West LAA network is set out at the end of this document.

LSPs usually operate under a Board structure and representation from your Council will either be through a lead Member or a senior officer. This guidance is intended to help you to begin your influence at that level.

Many of the LSPs are set up with supporting Theme or Action Groups. Some of these are based specifically on the four themes of the original round of LAAs (Children & Young People, Safer and Stronger Communities, Healthier Communities and Older people, Economic Development and the Environment) whilst others may have a number of different groupings based on subsets of the four themes. Many LSPs have charged existing partnerships to deliver the agenda. It is vital to make yourself known in the Groups and Partnerships relevant to your service.

Each LSP has a duty to produce a Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS), which is reviewed on a regular basis.

The new LAAs will consist of a base set of 18 pre-existing statutory educational targets, up to 35 improvement targets drawn from the national indicator set and may also include purely locally agreed targets. Whilst being taken from the national set, there is an expectation that local priorities from the SCS will form the core of the negotiated 35 improvement targets and so each area could have a different set of improvement targets, dependent upon the local needs. The government will not expect reports on the purely locally agreed targets but they do expect the SCS to also influence those local

initiatives. So engagement in the SCS process is another opportunity for regulatory services to influence the agenda.

It is important to keep in touch with the negotiations for LAAs. The key is partnership working so there may be openings to contribute to LAAs already being discussed. Do not assume that the key stakeholders know what we do.

The evidence from the early rounds of LAAs show that partnership working has improved as a direct result of LAA work so there are other benefits to be gained.

Key elements of the LAA negotiations are performance data and information on risks. The Government may be prescriptive on some areas with national priorities and these may need to be reflected through the LAAs. This will mean that the number that will be locally driven may be less than 35 and hence it is vital that regulatory services officers act swiftly to take advantage of their opportunities.

Some National Indicators, such as NI182 (business satisfaction), are key to regulatory services but there are many opportunities to be a contributory partner in the new set of indicators, for example, adopting a business support role can clearly contribute to economic indicators such as NI172 (business growth). The trick is to look at the changes that may be driven by Hampton and Rogers Review and see where a new approach to the delivery of regulatory services within that agenda can contribute to the LAA. Examples of the initiatives currently forming part of an agreed LAA, where regulatory services can have an impact can be seen on the LSP websites.

In two tier areas, negotiations are likely to be more complex. As well as identifying those indicators to which you can make a contribution, look out for the district specific improvement indicators in the national set where performance is reported at a district level, or where it is important to reflect neighbourhood issues and try to get those issues to the LAA discussion forums.

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill, which received Royal Assent on 30th October, requires LAs and Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) to produce a joint strategic needs assessment. If you do not already have a good working relationship with your Director of Public Health then now is the time to start. The White Paper proposed that all LSPs should have a Health & Well-Being Partnership (may also be known as Health Gain Partnership or similar). We are key players in that Partnership across a wide range of health improvement gains.

The funding arrangements in the new LAAs have changed from the existing pooling of area-based funding streams linked to targets to a wider approach. The government is expecting Council Tax, other mainstream funding, formula grant, Single Capital Pot, ring-fenced grants to be used as well as the unring-fenced, area-based LAA grant. The decision of amounts of funding will be made and hence can be influenced, locally. Initiatives on your Corporate Programme will give credibility to your bids for inclusion in LAAs.

It is clear that LAAs are here to stay and are highly likely to become a key driver in our future work. New LAAs will be the only place where central government will agree targets with local authorities and their partners on outcomes delivered by us at the local level. The timescale will be tight so it is vital that service heads start making their contacts as soon as possible.

Indicative timetable for LAAs

2007

October/November: Possible completion of national indicator set and guidance package. Regional roadshows to discuss implementation arrangements. All LAs consulting on Sustainable Community Strategy targets, preparing material for discussion of new LAAs with Government Offices.

December: All LAs consulting on new LAA outcomes frameworks, funding plans and performance arrangements; Government Offices and central departments review of proposed priorities.

2008

January: Negotiation of priorities based on departmental and GO discussions and LA/LSP consultations.

February: LAs submit revised outcomes framework to Government Offices.

March: Continuing negotiation of priorities based on departmental and GO discussions and LA/LSP consultations;

April: LAs submit revised outcomes framework to Government Offices which will include proposed improvement targets.

May: Continuing negotiation of improvement targets based on departmental and GO discussions and LA/LSP consultations

June: GO Regional Directors make recommendations to central government; Ministerial Sign off.

Useful links:

Department of Communities and Local Government

New Local Area Agreements

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/performanceframeworkpartnerships/localareaagreements/>

Negotiating New Local Area Agreements

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/negotiatingnewlaas>

Contact: laa@communities.gsi.gov.uk

LACORS

Next Generation Local Area Agreements – Introductory Briefing for Regulatory Services

<http://www.lacors.gov.uk/lacors/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?N=8000&Ne=0+2000+3000+4000+5000+6000+7000+8000+9000+10000+11000&authcode=25132CB&id=16948>

The New Performance Framework for Local Authorities - Single Set of Indicators.

<http://www.lacors.gov.uk/lacors/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?N=8000&Ne=0+2000+3000+4000+5000+6000+7000+8000+9000+10000+11000&authcode=25132CB&id=17755>

LAA CONTACT LIST

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Sld/laa/contact list nov 07