

PUBLIC SERVICES NEWS!

AWICS

Independence.....Integrity.....Value
Adrian Waite (Independent Consultancy Services)
Limited



Second Edition

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Social Services Green Paper – the end of Social Services as we know it?

The child protection green paper has unleashed radical changes to Social Services and could lead to the National Health Service taking over adult care.

It states councils will have to appoint a Director and a Cabinet member with responsibility for both education and child social services. Ministers expect the services to be integrated, possibly meaning the end of social service departments.

Under the plans, the departments would link to health, police, youth advice service Connexions and young offender services through children's trusts, led by councils.

Some in Local government have welcomed the proposals. The honorary secretary of the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers, Mr Tim Byles has said:

"This is an exciting paper. This is the service area more than any other that keeps chief executives awake at night."

Alison King, chair of the Local Government Association social services and health executive, said:

"The LGA is happy about having one named officer and councillor responsible for children's services, but the issue is the degree of prescription."

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The moves mean the future of adult social services is now uncertain. Ms. King suggested councils might set up “adult” departments.



The Association of Directors of Social Services warn that the changes could lead to child and adult services becoming divergent professions, a situation that could leave social workers ill-equipped to deal with whole families.

Association president David Behan said it would be essential to retain a unified social work profession so social workers can support children and their families.

Today's social services departments were set up in 1971 before adult and children's social services were split.

KEY PROPOSALS FROM THE GREEN PAPER

- ❖ Councils to appoint a director of children's services responsible for education and child social services.
- ❖ Councils to appoint a cabinet member with responsibility for all children's services.
- ❖ Education and child social services encouraged to be combined in one department.
- ❖ Councils to decide how adult social services will be organised if split from child services.
- ❖ Children's Trust in each area, normally led by the council, to bring together services with the police, NHS, Connexions and youth offending teams.
- ❖ Independent commissioner to represent children's views in policy making but no direct authority over councils.
- ❖ Duty on councils to promote educational attainment of children in care.
- ❖ Councils required to have database of children accessible to all agencies.
- ❖ One led professional on each case known to more than one agency.
- ❖ Area child protection committees to be succeeded by local safeguarding children's boards.
- ❖ Review of pay, incentives and conditions to improve attractiveness of child social work as a career.

Linda Mackay

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Comprehensive Performance Assessment the 1st Results – what can we learn from them

The comprehensive performance assessment for district councils uses a 'lighter touch' methodology than was used with the unitary authorities, and centres on two diagnostic models – one for housing and the other for public space, along with assessments of benefits and resources and corporate capacity. This is done through self-assessment. There are two diagnostic models for housing: Balancing Housing Markets, and the Decent Homes Standard. Authorities with stock will focus on the latter while those that have transferred their stock will focus on the former.

The district councils are being assessed through a rolling programme that started with a pilot project in West Sussex and then moved to Cumbria and Devon in June 2003. It will conclude in the summer of 2004. Assessments in the north of England, where the boundary commission is currently considering proposals for local government reorganisation, will be completed by January 2004 so that information on the performance of councils can feed into the boundary commission's deliberations.

The assessment of the corporate and strategic capacity of district councils will consider the ability of the council to:

- ❖ Do things pro-actively
- ❖ Prioritise and direct resources accordingly
- ❖ Balance local and national goals
- ❖ Talk to the community
- ❖ Reflect and learn

The diagnostic model for the decent homes standard includes the following themes:

- ❖ What is the council trying to achieve in relation to the standard. Does the council know the condition of their housing stock and their compliance with the decent homes standard?
- ❖ Is the council delivering its plans to meet the decent homes standard?
- ❖ How well does the council monitor its progress and how effectively does this feed into future strategies and plans?

The diagnostic model for balancing housing markets includes the following themes:

- ❖ How well does the council understand its housing market, and from its understanding, has the council developed the right proposals to help balance its housing markets?
- ❖ What are the council's actions and what outcomes has it achieved in helping to balance housing markets?
- ❖ How well does the council monitor its progress and impact in helping to balance housing markets and how effectively does this feed into future strategies and plans?

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The diagnostic model for public space includes the following themes:

- ❖ How well does the council contribute to the management of the physical environment?
- ❖ How does the council help keep the locality clean?
- ❖ Does the council work with partners to improve community safety?
- ❖ Does the council contribute to activities to positively engage children and young people?

The West Sussex authorities have achieved more than satisfactory ratings in the comprehensive performance assessment. However, it remains to be seen whether this pattern will be repeated in other counties, especially where there are complex and demanding communities.

The first results were declared in West Sussex in July 2003. Chichester and Horsham District Councils both achieved an excellent rating. Chichester District Council was described as having in place the right building blocks to bolster areas of poor performance. Horsham District Council was described as highly ambitious, with clear aims that are the result of extensive consultation – but suffering from a lack of clear prioritisation of actions. Arun District Council was assessed as ‘good’ as it has a clear understanding of place and works well internally and in partnership, but plans are often not specific enough.

The remaining district councils in West Sussex: Crawley, Mid Sussex and Worthing, were all assessed as ‘fair’. Crawley is considered to have invested soundly in its capacity to deliver improvements, and is ambitious, but has a history of not exploiting its potential. In Mid Sussex, the council’s aims and priorities are becoming more focused and based on local consultation. Worthing Borough Council has a balance of strengths and weaknesses and overall is going forward.

These results go some way to allaying fears that district councils would fare badly in the comprehensive performance assessment, thus strengthening arguments for unitary county councils. However, this pattern may not be seen in other parts of England.

Sir Michael Lyons, Director of the Institute of Local Government Studies said that:

“The results might reflect the fact that stable, relatively prosperous communities are likely to have stable, relatively well performing local authorities...(and that this may not be the case where there are) complex and demanding communities.”

The next tranche of districts to be assessed – in Cumbria and Devon – include some complex and demanding communities, and while draft reports will not be issued until August and final reports not until September, initial evidence is available in the form of the interim feedback. This suggests that the audit commission has not been as impressed with some authorities in Cumbria and Devon as it has with those in West Sussex.

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In one authority where local challenges are complex and demanding the interim feedback included the following corporate weaknesses:

- Ambition - Some ambitions for improving local Quality of Life are vague and few are outcome focused; Some ambitions are not robust and are unrealistic – though some targets are deliberately aspirational to emphasise the scale of challenge.
- Prioritisation - Key corporate and service objectives are not explicitly prioritised; Slow response to some national priorities (examples race equality, housing renewal areas).
- Focus - Performance information is not used effectively to maintain focus; No strategic plans for some key functions
- Capacity - Links with some sections of the voluntary and community sectors are under developed; Some arrangements to maximise internal capacity have not been fully effective (*sickness absence*)
- Performance Management - Performance management culture not yet embedded, at officer or councillor level; Procurement options have not been fully explored
- Quality of Service - Under performing against some key PIs, and against some LPIs
- Achievement of Improvement - Unsatisfactory progress in some key areas
- Investment - Insufficient investment available for training and development to deliver the extensive change agenda; Consultation arrangements are not formalised, with limited coordination to prevent duplication
- Learning - Little tangible evidence of the benefits arising from the learning process; Limited use of the outcomes from consultation, surveys and feedback
- Future Plans - HR implications are not explicitly considered during strategic planning; Diversity issues are not always addressed within future plans

The authority was found to have the following weaknesses regarding the decent homes standard:

- Lack of detailed information about which homes are decent
- No up-to-date picture of housing demand due to delayed housing needs survey
- The council's own resources will not deliver the decent homes target
- Full range of procurement options have yet to be considered
- A long-term programme for decent homes work has yet to be developed
- Delivery of performance against key strategies, including the housing strategy, is not routinely reported to or monitored by senior managers
- Lack of linkage between some future plans (*specifically mentioned local plan and housing strategy*)

The authority was found to have the following weaknesses with regard to public open space:

- The council does not have a waste strategy
- Traditional working practices and procurement methods do not enable the council to know if it is providing value for money
- The waste service is high cost and a high volume of waste is collected
- The council does not keep a record of cleansing standards for public inspection
- Satisfaction surveys are not carried out to monitor improvement or example reductions in the level of littering and dog fouling
- Littering is apparent in some areas because of inadequate work coordination

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- Ambitions for Community Safety are not realistic and are largely crime focused, rather than on broader community safety issues which can impact on quality of life
- Links with the Local Strategic Partnership and the way in which crime and disorder activities will impact on Community Plan objectives are not clear
- There is a lack of ownership of Community Safety issues at a corporate level
- Local crime levels are continuing to increase
- Actions and targets in the community safety strategy 2002-2005 are not realistic and are not being achieved
- No systematic approach to evaluation of strategies and initiatives to ensure learning is identified and limited evidence of impact on quality of life outcomes
- There is no evidence of how successful marketing initiatives have been
- Parish councils say the council does not provide well for young people

The local authority that received this interim feedback was not satisfied that it reflected accurately upon them and so appealed against some aspects of it.

They complained that some key strengths listed in their self-assessment appeared to be missing. For example, the fact that Foot & Mouth did not distract them from their focus on regeneration.

They did not disagree with many of the weaknesses identified, particularly concerning the two areas which they themselves had highlighted – prioritisation and performance management. They asked that care be taken to ensure that these issues do not spill over into others. For example – under Focus 'initiative & project overload' is likely to be a result of not adequately prioritising objectives.

They had concerns that the Inspection Team had a significant quantity of information to respond to in a short time frame. They felt that some of the issues raised as weaknesses had been adequately dealt with via the information contained in the self-assessments and the supporting documentation supplied during the assessment.

Clearly there is a lot of potential for subjective interpretation of the situation in particular authorities, and those authorities that feel they have been unfairly criticised by the inspectors should issue a challenge.

In the case of the case study within the briefing paper that is available on the website, the authority has chosen to challenge the inspectors on a number of issues and to justify the local situation in instances where the inspectors have considered it to be a weakness. I am sure that it will not be the only authority to follow this path!

Full briefing papers on the Comprehensive Performance Assessment are available on the website, by clicking:

<http://www.awics.co.uk/page22>

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The Allocation of Management and Maintenance Allowances within Housing Revenue Account Subsidy

Changes to the housing subsidy system as a result of rent restructuring will lead to authorities being forced to spend on management and maintenance at the level of their management and maintenance allowances. This is not currently the case as authorities are able to set rents above the level assumed in the subsidy calculation and spend the difference on management or maintenance. As the ability to do this is being removed, government has recognised a need to increase the level of management and maintenance allowances nationally; and to review the formulae to ensure that the total is distributed amongst authorities equitably and on the basis of need.

The government issued a consultation paper in July 2003 that proposes changes to the way that management and maintenance allowances are calculated. The consultation paper states that:

“Management and maintenance allowances are a key expenditure assumption within the Housing Revenue Account subsidy system. The current formulae used to distribute management and maintenance allowances between local authorities are over ten years old, and are therefore long overdue for review. Getting the expenditure assumptions within Housing Revenue Account subsidy right is even more important given the changes to the income assumptions being made as a result of rent restructuring.”

The main changes proposed for management allowances are summarised below:

- ❖ The existing formula uses proportion of flats to explain both the additional costs of managing flats and as a proxy for deprivation. The new formula retains a reduced emphasis on the proportion of flats, to cover the costs of managing communal and shared facilities, and because there is evidence of increased levels of rent arrears, neighbour disputes and racial harassment, particularly in medium- and high-rise flats.
- ❖ A separate deprivation factor is included, based on the measure of deprivation already used in the capital allocations.
- ❖ Total crime level by county is a new factor introduced as a proxy for the costs of dealing with anti-social behaviour.
- ❖ Population sparsity is no longer included. Instead, there is recognition that all authorities have a certain level of fixed costs, no matter how few dwellings they have.

- ❖ A measure of the actual number of voids and re-lets is used, as there is evidence of the significant costs to all authorities of managing and re-letting void properties. As with maintenance, voids have not been used in the calculation of management targets before now.
- ❖ There will continue to be an adjustment for geographical variations in costs.

The main changes proposed for maintenance allowances are summarised below:

- ❖ The new model follows a similar basic approach to the existing formula, using archetypes to model the impact of built form, age and size of dwellings on maintenance costs.

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- ❖ But instead of one base weight per archetype, each archetype has three base costs associated with it – representing the differential costs of responsive repairs, planned repairs and works to voids. After other factors are added in, a 'sub-target' is produced for each of these three types of maintenance, which are summed to give the target prior to regional cost adjustments.
- ❖ A new 'backlog' factor is added to the responsive repairs target, representing the impact of the major repairs backlog on urgent, day-to-day repairs.
- ❖ A measure of the actual number of voids and re-lets is used in assessing the relative cost of void works for each authority. Voids have not been used in the calculation of maintenance targets before.
- ❖ A social deprivation factor is no longer included. Instead total crime levels by county are used to represent the costs of graffiti and vandalism to responsive and void works.
- ❖ There will continue to be an adjustment for geographical variations in costs.

The government has set a deadline for observations of 15th October 2003.

The proposals in this consultation paper would lead to a significant redistribution of resources. This is particularly because the proposed reduction in weighting given to flats will redistribute resources away from London boroughs and some core cities towards authorities that score highly on the new measures of need. Some authorities would gain significantly; others, especially in London will lose significantly. As a result, many authorities are making representations to government either in support of, or in opposition to, the proposals in the consultation paper. 'AWICS' is providing assistance to authorities in framing their responses.

The proposals that are contained in the consultation paper on management and maintenance allowances are significant in that they represent a significant redistribution of resources. Authorities are also moving to a position where they will be obliged to spend at the level of their management and maintenance allowances rather than having the capacity to spend in excess of them, as at present.

Some authorities – principally in the north and midlands - stand to gain significantly from the proposals, and this will be welcomed by them as they consider that they have suffered in the past from receiving relatively low management and maintenance allowances, and this is considered to have resulted from inequities in the existing formulae.

Other authorities, principally in London, stand to lose resources should these proposals be introduced, and they are making strong representations that the proposals should be modified.

'AWICS' is assisting authorities in preparing their submissions on this important matter. The government's closing date for consultation is 15th October 2003.

A full briefing paper is available on the website. To view briefing papers on housing, please click below:

<http://www.awics.co.uk/page24>

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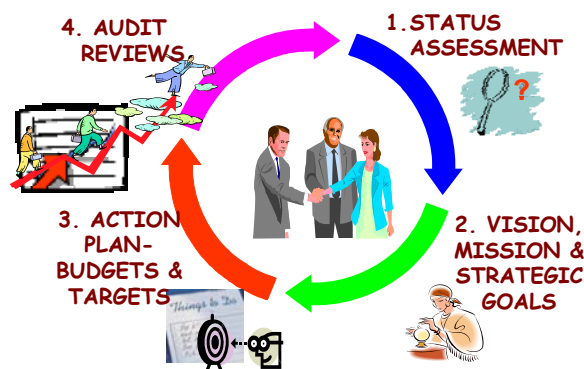
Business Planning, Best Value and Business Reviews

A fundamental part of a Best Value Review is to challenge the existing arrangements, and often an experienced, constructively critical friend such as an 'AWICS' consultant can best provide this challenge. However, we can provide more assistance with a Business or Best Value Review than external challenge! This includes project managing a Business or Best Value Review, providing financial or other expertise, or undertaking the complete Business review from an independent standpoint. More recently, AWICS has provided support to authorities dealing with the comprehensive performance assessment.

Recent work includes project managing Best Value Reviews of Economic Development, Waste Management and Environmental Sustainability at Lewisham Borough Council; project managing a Best Value Review of Economic Development and Lifelong Learning for East Dunbartonshire Council and project managing a Best value Review of Direct Works for Christchurch Borough Council. We have just completed a series of training courses on the comprehensive performance assessment for the Northern Housing Consortium.

Strategic Business Planning is an important part of this process.

What is strategic business planning (SBP) It certainly involves more than just adding, say, 5% on last year's figures and should involve fundamental questions about the organisation and where it is going? So what should the process involve? The process stages include many key actions, but in simple terms can be described as follows:-



1. Status assessment - an appraisal of what the organisation is doing well and what it needs to improve- sometimes called the SWOT analysis (*a review and analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats*). As part of this stage, key management also need to consider short-term business objectives (business plan foundation) and long-term aims (strategic plan) as well as the values and how the organisation, and the services it provides, wants to be viewed externally.

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2. Formalisation of the vision statement (long term objectives) and mission statement (year's key focus and objectives). The mission statement should separate out the strategic goals and identify actions that they are met, including individual roles, responsibilities, timescales and costs.

3. Action Plan- Targets and Budget preparation. Budgets and targets cannot be determined accurately without following the previous stages of the SBP process. The process is equally important for individual departments as well as the organisation as a whole. The problem is illustrated all too often when misunderstandings occur regarding aims and objectives, and as a result budget and target variances occur. As Winston Churchill once said "*Failing to Plan is Planning to Fail*". It is also during this stage when consensus is achieved, and hence ownership and accountability

4. Audit Reviews. Obviously regular formal reviews need to take place in order to monitor progress, identify potential issues and take corrective action where necessary. This process is proven best practice. The results achieved from following the SBP process on an organisation, or an individual department, both in terms of morale and effective performance can be dynamic, dramatic and immediate.

An outside agency, such as AWICS, can support the process throughout or can play a more limited role, perhaps providing an independent 'chairperson' for crucial meetings or as trainers to provide practical 'knowledge transfer'.

Peter Sutcliffe

More detailed information regarding various subjects including those covered in this Newsletter can be found in the section entitled briefing papers on our Website.

<http://www.awics.co.uk/page8>

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Letters –

The views that are expressed in these letters are those of the authors and not necessarily those of 'AWICS'.

Public Services News

"The newsletter is both interesting and useful; please keep me on the mailing list. Good luck with this venture. Kind Regards."

Adrienne Wilson, Government Office for the Southeast.

Public Services are invaluable.

(This letter appeared in the Cumberland News on 22nd August 2003)

"At least five news items in your edition of August 15 show the sad state we have got into through the effects of the Thatcher legacy of putting a financial value on everything combined with socialist obsession with regulation.

"Allerdale decides to enforce parking regulations, but says the new traffic wardens will have to issue at least 22,000 tickets a year to justify the cost. If they fail to meet this target, will more and more yellow lines be painted till they can? There is some wrong thinking here. If we insist on making laws, we should be prepared to enforce them regardless of the cost.

"Wigton's magnificent central monument cannot be restored to its original role as a public drinking fountain because United Utilities would charge too much for the water; this despite the fact that it would not be running continuously to waste, but only when someone wanted a drink from it. George Moore and others who years ago provided similar public benefits, together with countless water troughs for horses, must be turning in their graves.

"The county council proposed to sell of "Talkin tarn" (Country park near Carlisle, Cumbria) because it cannot afford to spend £500,000 or £1.4 million (both figures have been mentioned at different times) "to bring it up to modern standards." What on earth is wrong with it as it is?

"Children's paddling pools have been drained for "health and safety" reasons. The mind boggles to try to work out what these might be. Presumably full time park keepers, who live in lodges on site, and supervised their parks 24 hours a day, are now too expensive and "cost/benefit analysis" determines the public amenity must be abandoned.

"The commission for Health Improvement (sic) insists that cottage hospitals must no longer offer a minor injuries service at night, because funding restraints mean that the night staff has no spare capacity even to deal with someone who has cut their finger and needs it dressing. One has to ask how the hospital copes when one of the nurses has to go to the lavatory!

We really must stop looking at public services and amenities in financial terms."

Thomas Thompson, Thursby.

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Feedback

We would be grateful if you could let us have some feedback on 'Public Services News' and some other services that we provide by completing this questionnaire.

Public Services News

Which topics in the Newsletter are of most interest to you?

Are there any subjects that you would like to see covered in future issues?

Do you have any further comments on the Newsletter.

Web Site

Have you visited our web site? Yes No

If you have visited our website what features did you find useful:

Information about the company _____

Information about products _____

Briefing Papers _____

If you have accessed any of the briefing papers, which did you find most useful?

Are there any other subjects on which you would find a briefing paper useful?

Advertisements

Have you seen an 'AWICS' advertisement? If so, where?

Do you have any other comments:

Signed (optional) _____ Organisation _____ Date _____

Please return the questionnaire either via email (Adrian.waite@awics.co.uk) or by post to the address below.

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