

Dear Colleague,

Promoting Excellence in Councils' Adult Social Care – Producing 'Local accounts'

Background to Promoting Excellence in Councils' Adult Social Care Programme Board

With Councils now responsible for their own improvement, we have a collective responsibility for the performance of the sector as a whole. A 'Promoting Excellence in Councils' Adult Social Care Programme Board' has been set up by key representatives from the sector to assist with this. The Programme Board met for the first time in May and is chaired by Richard Jones (ADASS), with a membership that includes the Local Government Group, the Care Quality Commission and the Department of Health (DH).

The Programme Board has also obtained approval from the Department of Health to negotiate a Memorandum of Understanding that could lead to the provision of £550,000 towards sector led improvement. This will be both be used to fund key national posts developed to support this work and distributed to regional ADASS regions so that the model of sector led development then can be developed with and through ADASS regions.

As part of its initial work, the Board wishes to promote the use of 'Local Accounts' as a way of demonstrating and describing performance in adult social care to local people.

Although this would be subject to local discretion, the Board would like to suggest that all councils with social care responsibilities consider producing a short, accessible local account during 2011/12 and preferably by December 2011.

Background to local accounts

With the abolition of the Annual Performance Assessment, the publication of a single data set for local government and the development of outcomes frameworks for adult social care and separately for the NHS and public health, the Board believes that it is important that councils find a meaningful way of reporting back to citizens and consumers about performance. It is suggested that the publication of an annual local account is one means of achieving this.

The concept of producing a local account is not a new idea but builds on work that councils are already doing on local quality assurance frameworks and safeguarding annual reports. It is also aligned with developments taking place around sector led improvement in children's services. Local accounts were mentioned in the Department of Health's 'Transparency in outcomes: a framework for adult social care' consultation paper (November 2010, section 4) in the context of localism and transparency, and in the subsequent 2011/12 outcomes framework published in March 2011. Responses from the sector to the Local Government Group consultation on 'Taking the Lead: Self Regulation and Improvement in Local Government' also included many positive responses to the wider use of self assessment as a tool for improvement and local accountability. The distribution of this letter to Directors has been brought to the attention of Chief Executives via the Local Government Group's communication channels.

Local accounts are a potentially very useful means of councils with adult social care responsibilities reporting back to citizens and consumers on performance in adult social care. Local accounts can be used to engage with citizens and consumers around priorities and outcomes. They could become a key accountability mechanism to the public and a useful way of informing self-improvement activity locally. They also are a practical expression of sector self-regulation and improvement.

Suggestions around developing local accounts

The Board does not want to be prescriptive about the format, structure and content of local accounts because these are matters for local discretion. However, if local accounts are produced, it is recommended that they be customer-centric and be aimed at the whole community. At a minimum, this could mean that councils demonstrate how consumer feedback has fed into the local account. At the other end of the spectrum, this could mean that the local account is actually driven forward by consumers.

Councils also need to consider how they will secure appropriate independent and professional challenge and scrutiny of the quality of the outcomes achieved, for example, via external review of safeguarding practice, user feedback, overview and scrutiny, LINKs/Healthwatch, use of complaints, case file audits and monitoring of external services.

In addition, it is recommended that the local account produced in 2011/12 cover the period 2010/11 as a minimum but that it could include a period of time beyond this. It is suggested that councils report their Account to local people by placing it on their websites and that they consider it being published by the Lead Member. Additionally, councils might consider how to ensure that information is readily available to people who may not readily access websites.

The core requirement for a local account is to report on the quality of adult social care in the area, but in developing local accounts in adult social care, it could be useful for councils to be thinking through the following issues:

- How is the local account citizen/consumer driven?
- How might external challenge of the local account be undertaken in a way which allows an objective perspective?
- How does the local account relate to reporting on health outcomes?
- How does the local account fit with corporate reporting?
- What is the role of the LSP and other Boards, including the Adult Safeguarding Board, in feeding into the local account?
- What will be the role of the Health and Well-being Board (HWB Board) in feeding into the local account?

The suggested content of a Local Account

It is further suggested that the local account be a short document that is readily accessible, perhaps being made available in an easy read format.

In terms of content, it is suggested that councils consider the inclusion of the following:

- outcomes achieved for citizens and consumers (taking into account the national outcomes frameworks)
- adult safeguarding
- Think Local Act Personal
- equalities and diversity considerations
- productivity issues
- the quality of the local market
- complaints information and action taken as a result
- consumer feedback data
- feedback from relevant scrutiny reviews
- progress against local political priorities
- improvement priorities.

If key issues of concern are highlighted as part of the process of developing the local account, then these could be addressed within the council's own improvement planning. In addition, if citizens and consumers want further information, this should be made available to them.

More information, including examples of current practice, can be found on the Local Government Group Community of Practice at www.local.gov.uk

Next steps for the Board

We all need to learn from practice and experience in 2011/12 before any further information is provided on local accounts for 2012/13. Placing local accounts on local websites would enable the accounts to be gathered nationally so that good/innovative practice can be identified and shared with the sector. The developing practice in 2011/12 would feed into any further support the Board provides in 2012/13.

If you have any queries about the work of the Programme Board or local accounts, please contact Paul Najsarek, Joint Chair of the Standards and Performance policy network, via paul.najsarek@harrow.gov.uk or via 020 8424 1981, ext 2981.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Hay,
ADASS President