

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE – 4 OCTOBER 2001

ACCOUNTS COMMISSION FOR SCOTLAND – LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1992 – CONSULTATION ON THE 2001 DIRECTION

Report by Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Resources

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1** To advise the Committee of the consultation paper issued by the Accounts Commission containing proposals for its 2001 Direction and to request approval of the officer's response to the consultation document.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1** The Accounts Commission has published its Consultation Paper in which it sets out its proposals for the Performance Information to be reported by Scottish Councils in 2002/03.

- 2.2** During last year's consultation, the commission clarified its criteria for the selection of Statutory Performance Indicators (SPIs) by recognising these should :-

- i)** Be focused on the output or outcome of service delivery, balanced by a range of efficiency indicators to allow a rounded view of how well services are delivered.
- ii)** Demonstrate clearly whether a change represents an improvement or deterioration of performance.
- iii)** Refer to national targets or standards rather than local ones, so that inter-authority comparison can be made.

- 2.3** It was also decided that indicators which were seen as important for benchmarking or for wider performance accountability should not be deleted until either better indicators or other collection mechanisms had been developed. Where such indicators have not yet been developed it was agreed to continue to include such indicators in the statutory set until other bodies, usually professional associations, were in the position to take over specifying, defining and disseminating the data and that in the interim period these indicators would be identified as 'transitional' in Accounts Commission publications.

- 2.4** Comments on the Direction were required to be submitted to the Accounts Commission by 14 September 2001. In order to comply with this timescale, a provisional officer's response has been submitted, subject to approval by this Committee.

3.0 PROPOSALS FOR THE 2001 DIRECTION

- 3.1** The proposals for the 2001 Direction are limited in order to allow policy to develop in several key areas. The Commission has concerns to allow time for development,

most evidently in Education and Community Care Policy, before introducing changes in order to ensure that SPIs are complimentary to national objectives and targets for service delivery.

3.2 In addition to the detailed responses in relation to individual indicators, consultees were also invited to comment on the principle of introducing SPIs requiring specific survey work on users perceptions of service quality and on the Commission's role of tracking the performance of partnership working. Of those indicators for which the council is responsible, 4 new indicators have been introduced, 4 have been deleted and 4 transitional indicators remain. The table below shows the extent of the proposals contained within the Direction.

3.3 Proposals For The 2000 Direction

Service	Unchanged indicators	Changed indicators	Deleted indicators	Transitional indicators	New indicators	Total indicators
Benefits Administration	3	0	0	0	0	3
Building Control	0	1	0	0	0	1
Council-wide Functions	4	0	0	0	0	4
Education	6	0	1	0	1	7
Environmental Health	4	0	0	1	0	4
Environmental Services	3	1	0	0	0	4
Finance	4	0	0	0	1	5
Fire	5	0	0	0	0	5
Housing	6	0	0	1	0	6
Leisure and Recreation	4	0	0	1	0	4
Libraries	3	0	1	0	1	4
Planning	2	2	0	0	0	4
Police	5	2	0	0	2	9
Roads and Lighting	3	0	2	0	1	4
Social Work	10	1	2	0	0	11
Trading Standards	2	0	0	1	0	2
Total	64	7	7	4	6	77

4.0 PROPOSED RESPONSE ON THE DIRECTION

4.1 A copy of this Council's proposed response on the Direction is included as an appendix to this report.

4.2 This response has been compiled following consultation with all departments of the Council and includes only those indicators which are changed / new or where specific comments on existing indicators are considered relevant.

5.0 POLICY, FINANCIAL AND LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Publication of the performance indicators is a statutory requirement under the Local Government Act 1992. Any financial implications resulting from the compilation of data will be reported, as required, by departments to their respective service committees.

6.0 CONCLUSION

6.1 The collection and publication of statutory performance information is regarded by the Accounts Commission to be central to the process of ensuring that councils provide continuously improving services. The opportunity to comment on the Direction allows for the views of practitioners to be heard and hopefully incorporated within future performance indicators.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 The Committee is asked to:

(i) agree the Officer's response on the 2001 Direction as contained in the appendix to this report as this Council's response to the Accounts Commission's consultation; and

(ii) to otherwise note the contents of the report.

Fiona Lees
Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Resources
3 September 2001

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

Accounts Commission 2001 Direction.

Any persons wishing to inspect the above background paper or wishing further information on this report should contact Fiona Lees, Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Resources (Tel: 01563 576019) or Douglas Campbell, Head of Corporate Development and Communication (Tel: 01563 576165)

COMMENTS ON THE ACCOUNTS COMMISSION CONSULTATION ON THE 2001 DIRECTION

1.0 GENERAL COMMENTS

1.1 Effectiveness and Accountability of Partnerships

The council agrees that Community Planning and the Modernising Government Agenda have increased partnership working and shared responsibility for a wide range of public services and agrees that a framework for tracking the progress of such cross cutting policies and services is required.

The council agrees that as several bodies, such as councils, health authorities, housing bodies, local enterprise companies etc will all be involved in contributing towards achievement of improvement, that monitoring arrangements should be developed alongside SPIs rather than being added to SPIs. The council welcomes the Accounts Commission's involvement with the Community Planning Task Force to develop a framework of appropriate monitoring arrangements in this respect.

1.2 SPIs and Users Surveys

Whilst the council fully recognises the extensive benefit of customer and stakeholder feedback, it does not support the principle of introducing SPIs which require specific survey work on users perceptions of service quality.

The principal reasons for not supporting SPIs based on surveys, in relation to sampling, methodology and the difficulty of understanding and interpreting local circumstances have already been clearly outlined in the consultation document. The cost of undertaking nation-wide surveying should also be considered against the crude comparisons between councils which would result from such surveying.

The council firmly believes that surveying at a local level, with the specific purpose of service development and continuous improvement, is much more appropriate. Surveying of this nature is currently covered by the Accounts Commission's PMP Audits and the results of such surveys are often incorporated within council's Public Performance Reporting arrangements. The existing arrangements in the council's opinion satisfy both audit/scrutiny requirements and the public's demand for information on the performance of councils and consequently they should remain unchanged.

1.3 Capital Charges

The council is concerned that the current methodology of allocating overheads, which includes inherited capital debt, in relation to capital charges for financial Performance Indicators is inappropriate as it results in distortion of costs and misinforms customers on the true cost of services provided.

As a consequence it is suggested that capital charges should not be included within Financial Performance indicators.

2.0 SPECIFIC INDICATORS

2.1 Building Control - Indicator 1

The changes suggested in this indicator bring a degree of standardisation between councils that is currently lacking.

All councils have already been consulted and contributed to the design of the new indicator, through senior officers' membership of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors.

Internal management information systems will need to be updated to accommodate the changes. This should not pose any problems and the council welcome the changes proposed to this indicator.

2.1 Education - Indicator 7 – Special Education Needs

The introduction of this new indicator to measure the degree of integration of children with special educational needs is welcomed. Such a measure is perceived as being relevant to the legal obligations of the education service, and the priorities of this council.

With regard to the definition for such an indicator, a clear definition of what constitutes 'a child with special educational needs' would be highly desirable if not essential. Attention is drawn to present reported inconsistencies in the opening of records of needs across the country. Such inconsistencies would reduce the value of the indicator for the purpose of comparison. Certainly the type of league tables published by Audit Scotland would have neither value or validity if possession of a record of needs was used as the definition. An alternative would be to use the number of pupils who had an individualised education programme (IEP); this would be a more sensitive indicator and would allow some cross-referencing with the HMIE target setting initiative. Again, however it is pointed out that there would be a consistency issue.

The council can see no real logic in the sub-division proposed within this indicator for sections B and C. Quite simply, if the council believes that a child should be in a mainstream school, they would be in a mainstream school. The return would therefore always be 100% in relation to these sections of the indicator. While it is therefore fully accepted that there will be a number of pupils who would never be considered for a mainstream place, in practice the only way to generate useful information would be by ascertaining the number of children with a record of needs and the number of those children educated in separate schools and calculating a percentage on that basis. Alternatively the number of children with an IEP and the number of those children educated in separate special schools could be used.

2.2 Education Service Expenditure - Indicator 8

The council believes that if this indicator is to be replaced by one directly related to national priorities, its deletion is welcome.

2.3 Environmental Services – Indicator 2

The council agree with the proposal to only show special uplifts within 5 working days. It should however be noted that different authorities have different policies for dealing with special uplifts. Our authority collects most bulky waste from the kerbside while the majority of authorities do not provide this level of service and only operate a separate service for bulky items. Also, many authorities charge for their special uplift service. The above reasons impact upon the speed and level of service provided and unless every authority followed the same policy, any amendments to targets would not ensure that a fair comparison exists between authorities.

2.4 Environmental Services - Indicator 4

As mentioned in our response to the consultation paper last year, large disparities exist between Councils estimating recycling figures. The guidance behind the indicator in relation to estimates needs to be clarified. In some authorities, large assumptions are made when estimating the number of residents who carry out home composting. Where an authority issues free compost bins to every householder in the area, estimates of up to 30% total usage are in some instances being made. This has a dramatic effect on the overall level of recycling and renders comparison tables meaningless.

2.5 Finance - Indicator 3

The council notes the introduction of this new indicator which gives the income due from non-domestic rates and the percentage of this income received in the year. It would be expected that the definition will be consistent with the similar PI currently in place for council tax. The new indicator is in line with the council's existing monitoring arrangements for non-domestic rates and should be relatively straight forward to calculate.

2.6 Housing – Indicator 1

The council notes that this is a transitional indicator and would welcome the opportunity to comment on the changed proposals when available. The indicator currently looks at local targets which reflect the level of service deemed appropriate by the authority, the introduction of national standards will allow comparison but care must be taken to ensure that the indicator continues to reflect the local situation.

2.7 Leisure and Recreation – Indicators 1 and 2

The council believes that due to the differences in the usage between traditional pools and school pools, these should be reported separately within indicators 1 and 2 in order to show the distinction between these two types of pools.

With regard to the use of the total population figure in relation to indicator 1, as the majority of facilities in East Ayrshire are situated in small rural communities with limited catchment areas, the council feels that a more effective measure would be to use the number of attendances against the population figure within a five mile radius of each facility.

2.8 Leisure and Recreation - Indicator 3

Indicator 3 serves little purpose in areas such as our own where social inclusion and encouraging people to take part in active lifestyles often requires low cost use of sports facilities. The indicator only measures financial efficiency and does not take into account social factors. We would therefore support the proposal to delete this indicator in the period prior to the development of new indicators.

2.9 Libraries – Indicator 2

We agree with the proposals to delete this indicator and then replace it with the COSLA target levels which were originally set in 1995 to be reported in existing indicator number 3.

2.10 Libraries - Indicator 4

Museum registration is not a measure of quality that the public would recognise. This indicator should be deleted.

2.11 Libraries - Indicator 5 - Learning Centre and learning access point users

The council welcomes the introduction of this proposed indicator as it will provide a useful guide to the take up of services at a local level and a valid benchmark to compare with other authorities. It will, however, only have validity in the longer term after all learning centres have been rolled out in Scotland i.e. 2003/04.

There are however, several issues relating to this proposed PI these are further discussed in Appendix 1.

2.12 Planning – Indicator 3

The proposed change would not necessarily reflect the performance of a planning unit, particularly in relation to the quality of service available to the applicant. In striving to meet targets for turnaround of applications, the customer service levels will suffer, resulting in an increased number of appeals, a higher proportion of which would be successful. However, should planning units have higher levels of service as a specific policy objective, then the number of appeals (and by implication the number of successful appeals) will decrease.

However taking together the current indicator, with the proposed change, would provide a more informed indication of performance.

For the above reasons, the council's view would be that the current indicator should be retained, and that the new measure should be introduced as an additional reporting element.

2.13 Planning – Indicator 4 – Development Plans

The proposal takes us back to the preferred situation as it existed in 1998/99, and would report the policy document as used by the Reporter.

Consequently the council agrees that the proposed indicator should be adopted in place of the current PI.

2.14 Roads and Lighting – New Indicator

The Council is aware that this indicator has been used for a number of years in English councils, and since it is being refined rather than discarded in these councils, then its introduction in Scotland appears inevitable.

If this is the case then clarification of the issues detailed below becomes imperative.

There is a multitude of options to be considered in the consultation, with many of those options requiring further clarification and/or explanation.

The following comments are made on specific elements of the indicator:

- The result as published, will require technical knowledge or reference to a separate industry document (the "UKPMS Rules and Parameters"), making it a poor indicator for public consumption.
- It is unclear (without reference to the above manual) whether a high threshold figure represents good or bad performance, making it a poor indicator.
- The option to carry out an element of the survey on a cyclic basis would negate the annual nature of the indicator, and would make it unique amongst those currently reported.
- A specification for the work to be carried out would be required to ensure consistency across councils and over time.
- The preferred option as far as informing the design of the Roads Maintenance programme is concerned, is the most expensive by a factor of seven, in comparison with the "cheapest" option.
- The cost of collecting the indicator would be considerable, and would have an immediate impact on service levels in other areas of the division.
Indicative figures are shown below:

Survey / Inspection Type (@ 2,000 lane kilometres)	Cost (£000)
CVI (@ £20 per kilometre)	£30
More sophisticated surveys (eg MRM)	£86
Deflectograph	£210

Further comments of a more technical nature on this proposed indicator are enclosed as Appendix 2.

2.15 Social Work - Indicator 1 - Community Care Assessments

The council agrees that the proposed addition of care group "carers" is an appropriate addition to this indicator, however, it should be noted that care group is often recorded on information systems at the point of referral/screening at which time the involvement of the carer is not always apparent. Although all carers are offered a community care assessment the uptake is low. A more suitable indicator might be the number of carers who accepted an assessment expressed as a percentage of the number offered an assessment.

2.16 Social Work – Indicator 7 – Staff Qualifications

The council agree that it seems reasonable to transfer the responsibility to report on this indicator from local authorities to the Commission. However Local Authorities will still be responsible for ensuring that staff receive proper training and are suitably qualified, therefore staff qualification should remain an internal performance indicator.

2.17 Social Work – Indicator 8 – Privacy

This indicator reports on the facilities available in residential care homes and therefore the responsibility to collect this data and to report on this indicator should rest with the Scottish Commission on the Regulation of Care. It seems logical therefore to delete this along with the other two indicators which focus on residential care.

It should be noted that some authorities register places not rooms and the number of places does not necessarily equal the number of rooms, e.g. a home may have 60 rooms but we only register 12 places these may or may not be en-suite. It has been suggested that since we are required to report the position as at March 31st we are actually being required to report on the number of people in single room and /or en-suite. The council would suggest that if this is what is required the indicator should be:

The number of people in single rooms and the number of people in rooms with en-suite facilities expressed as a percentage of the total number of people in registered places as at March 31st.

If the number of people are reported as a percentage of the number of registered places the percentages could be skewed by vacant places.

2.18 Social Work – Indicator 9 – The Inspection of Registered Residential Homes

Since this function will no longer be the responsibility of local authorities it makes sense to delete this indicator.

2.19 Social Work – Indicators 11, 12 and 13 – Criminal Justice

Although Criminal Justice services in East Ayrshire will be grouped with the other Ayrshire authorities the delivery of front line services will largely remain the responsibility of individual authorities we therefore agree that councils should continue to report performance on an individual basis.

Libraries - Indicator 5 - Learning Centre and learning access point users

Library services will manage the NOF Learning Centres in a variety of ways e.g. booking systems, first come, first served systems etc. There needs to be a clearer definition of what constitutes “accessing a terminal” before any meaningful statistics can be gathered, as interpretation will vary between authorities, providing non-compatible statistical information. For example, ‘accessing a terminal’ issues:

- A session booked on a PC. But session times will vary from authority to authority e.g. half hour, hour, morning/afternoon/evening sessions
- By service accessed, e.g. Internet, email, or Office applications. For example, if a user books a session on a PC and checks his/her email, browses the Internet and writes a letter, should this count as 1 access/use, or should the different services accessed be counted as 3.
- A flexible learning package accessed online. A package may be accessed many times before it is completed. Does accessing one package many times indicate one use, or many uses?
- The ‘access’ indicator is apparently only to apply to NOF ‘networked PCs’, but non-networked PCs and non-NOF PCs (e.g. SLN or SLIC) used in learning centres also provide access to Office applications, flexible learning, CD ROMs etc.

There are also considerable concerns relating to the interpretation of the resulting statistics. While the statistical trend will indicate improvement or otherwise at a local level and as such is very useful, taking the results to benchmark authorities with one another is invalid. There are too many variables affecting the statistics:

- Library size, available space and staffing levels may affect the number of terminals installed and therefore availability of access at a particular library
- Library opening hours determine how much access can be offered
- Demographics of the area and population density will also affect take-up of the facilities.
- Where terminals are already an established cultural element, for example a large student population, there will probably be a greater demand for access, greater confidence about using terminals and therefore greater use.
- The local presence of other service sources, for example Cybercafes, would provide competition for NOF learning centres.
- The number of home terminals with Internet access in an area may also affect demand – affluent area compared to a SIP area.

Thus the interpretation that “the use of the service will reflect the extent to which it is marketed by the council and seen as a valuable service....” is not necessarily true.

The proposed PI also suggests introducing “family groups” of councils based on the draw down of funding to offset the phased introduction of the NOF Learning Centres. This will, however, not create a level playing field when assessing performance. Local needs and conditions mean that authorities will progress their Learning Centres in a wide variety of ways and at different rates.

Roads and Lighting - New indicator

General

1. The survey work is an additional cost to the Councils, therefore additional finance will be required from the Scottish Executive.
2. What purpose will the PI's serve? 100 metre fixed length merging of defects is based on 'length weighted averages of the Condition Indices' and this technique can result in relatively long defective lengths of the carriageway not being included in the Performance Indicator calculation. 100 metre fixed length merging produces very low Performance Indicators, typically 1% to 2%, for the non-principal Classified road networks.
3. CVI surveys are of very limited value to Roads Engineers in the consideration of long term, durable, structural maintenance proposals.
4. Will there be a role for deflection type surveys (for design of extended life etc) for consideration of PI's.
5. Could Performance Indicators not be designed around the 'Multi Function Road Monitor' or the 'Traffic-speed Condition Surveys (TRACS) machines.

Direct Comments on the Scottish Executive proposals

1. Principal routes should consist of 'A Class' roads including gritting routes. Non-principal routes 'B and C Class' routes.
2. The Condition Indices and Threshold Values, Structural 85, Edge 50 and Wearing Course 60, should apply only to the non-principal routes.
3. Only the Structural Condition Index, Threshold Value of 70, should apply to the principal routes.
4. Cyclic period - principal routes annually, non-principal routes 3-yearly.
5. Performance Indicators should distinguish between urban and rural with possible different Threshold Values.
6. Guidance is required on what is 'deemed coverage'.
7. Guidance is required as to timescale for implementation of the said PI's.

AGENDA