

PROGRESS TOWARDS IMPLEMENTING THE 1ST PHASE SINGLE OUTCOME AGREEMENTS IN 2008-09

WRITTEN EVIDENCE TO THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Introduction

1. The Scottish Government, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE) jointly welcome the opportunity to give evidence to the Local Government and Communities Committee on the Single Outcome Agreement approach and on the 'Interim Report from Local Government on the 1st Phase Single Outcome Agreements in 2008-09'.
2. This paper provides the Committee with information which supplements the Interim Report, in advance of the oral evidence session on 27 May 2009. It briefly covers:
 - the context for reporting on Single Outcome Agreements (SOAs);
 - the practicalities of reporting;
 - the Community Planning process; and
 - next steps.

We hope that the Interim Report and this supplementary information are helpful.

Context for reporting on SOAs

3. Local government and the Scottish Government share an ambition for the outcome focused planning and delivery of public services in Scotland. That ambition, to focus the attention and resources of public services on the achievement of results for citizens and communities – on outcomes - was reflected in the Concordat of November 2007 and then in the rapid pace of SOA development.
4. The Concordat has paved the way for an alignment of public services around shared outcomes, including the development with local government of national policy in key areas such as early years, health inequalities and anti-poverty. However, whilst the SOAs emanate from the Concordat, they are not the means by which the 'specified set of commitments' in the Concordat are delivered or reported. Those commitments are about the delivery of specific actions and outputs by the Scottish Government and local government at a national level. The SOAs are about the delivery of local outcomes, which will contribute to the achievement of the agreed National Outcomes in the National Performance Framework.
5. The SOA is not intended to describe everything that the Council and its Community Planning partners do, as it should be a high level strategic document focused on those issues which most need improvement in the local area. Equally, the SOA does not remove the ongoing requirements on Councils in relation to the scrutiny, regulation and inspection of their performance.
6. The SOA articulates the community's priorities, setting out the local outcomes which each Council and Community Planning Partnership (CPP) wish to achieve for their area by reflecting the evidence of local circumstances, needs and priorities. The SOA also shows how these local outcomes should contribute to the relevant agreed National Outcomes. The delivery of the National Outcomes will be through the actions of the Scottish Government and the contributions made by Councils and CPPs as they deliver their local outcomes. Those local contributions

will naturally take different forms in different areas, as different priorities are addressed with different things being delivered and reported.

7. For example, every Council and CPP is likely to have local outcomes which will contribute to National Outcome 6 (“We live our lives safe from crime, disorder and danger”). But those outcomes will address quite different local priorities in different parts of Scotland, such as road safety, domestic violence, house breaking, drug abuse, flooding or knife crime. These distinctive local priorities will be expressed as local outcomes, which will then be a focus of local attention and resources, with quite different things being done, measured and reported in different areas.
8. It will thus be possible at the local level to see how the National Outcomes are being delivered through local outcomes. However, there is no expectation that Councils and CPPs should, through SOAs, divert their attention and resources to prioritising, addressing and reporting on issues which are not demonstrably locally important. So the national aggregation of the different indicators used in SOAs will not be possible. The means for national reporting on the National Outcomes is through the National Indicators and Targets in the National Performance Framework, some of which are universally reported by Councils and Community Planning partners. The Scottish Government will, however, work to develop a national platform through which CPPs can record their progress in delivering their local outcomes and thus their varied local contributions to the National Outcomes.

Practicalities of reporting

9. Councils will provide their annual SOA progress reports around each September, once key data such as educational attainment in the preceding financial year is available. However, local government and the Scottish Government agreed that, exceptionally and for this one year only, a collective report should be provided by local government as an interim report in April 2009, on progress and achievements in the 1st phase SOAs in 2008-09.
10. As the Interim Report explains, there are real practical constraints on what can usefully be reported at this stage. The Interim Report therefore identifies the qualitative progress and achievements which, so far as possible, can be attributed to the SOA approach and were not already planned for other reasons. Because of the timing, the many local examples identified should be regarded as indicative, as is all the content of the draft 2nd phase SOAs, until they are finalised and agreed.
11. The major achievements in 2008-09 were twofold. The first was the early agreement of the 1st phase SOAs and then, crucially, the use of the learning and experience which that gave us. The second major achievement is the alignment across the public sector, both nationally and locally, around the shared outcomes in the National Performance Framework and in SOAs. Both achievements are described and demonstrated in the Interim Report.

The Community Planning process

12. We believe that the development and delivery of SOAs by CPPs is reinvigorating Community Planning, by giving effect to the intention of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 that Community Planning is “a process by which the public services provided in the area of the local authority are provided and the planning of that provision takes place”.

13. The requirement for Community Planning partners to jointly agree and then to deliver, on the basis of the local evidence, their communities' priorities for their areas, has sharply focused thinking. A key development is the formation of the National Community Planning Group, comprising SOLACE, the Association of Chief Police Officers Scotland (ACPOS), the Chief Fire Officers' Association Scotland (CFOAS) and the NHS Board Chief Executives Forum. This group brings chief officers together to consider and provide a practical resolution of issues arising from the joint agreement and delivery of outcomes for communities – including helping develop the advice on SOA governance and accountability which is annexed to the Interim Report.
14. The Interim Report highlights the many inter-related national and local partnership developments which helped embed the outcomes approach during 2008-09. In particular, the report identifies two key developments. Firstly, the Scottish Government Implementation Group has co-ordinated the liaison of Scottish Government Directors with individual Councils and then CPPs, so as to strengthen local and central understanding of the requirements for moving to an outcomes approach. This direct engagement has involved supportive challenge, with a particular encouragement for CPPs to focus on economic recovery, jointly developed areas of policy and other issues which CPPs may agree have particular local relevance and should be afforded local priority. The result is a growing understanding, trust and confidence between local government and the Scottish Government, and between local Community Planning partners.
15. Secondly, the draft 2nd phase SOAs show a commitment by many Councils and CPPs to the localisation of the outcomes approach, often around the new multi-member wards. In some areas the SOA is being translated into more local outcomes which are relevant to localities' circumstances. In other areas the SOA is being built up from the identification of outcomes for each locality.
16. This localisation of SOAs is building on the new political structures and creating a new infrastructure for community engagement, for governance, for service planning and delivery, and for performance management and reporting. Most significantly, as this infrastructure appears to be shared with Community Planning partners, it potentially represents a new dimension to the outcome focused planning and provision of public services.

Next steps

17. At both national and local levels we are moving from the development phases of SOAs to the delivery phase. While Councils will report around September 2009 on their progress in implementing the 1st phase SOAs in 2008-09, they will also be focusing their attention on the implementation of the 2nd phase SOAs which CPPs are currently finalising with the Scottish Government. The outcomes in those 2nd phase SOAs will be grounded in the evidence in their area profiles and will, by their nature, take time to achieve. As they are unlikely to change markedly over short periods there is no expectation that SOAs should be annually re-developed.
18. However, there is a clear expectation that SOAs should be annually reviewed and continually improved, with the draft 2nd phase SOAs indicating what further improvements are planned. The annual reviews of SOAs will take place in September each year, when all the data on progress in the preceding financial year should be available. These reviews will reflect on progress and changes in local conditions, priorities and resources. We expect that the Scottish Government's

liaison Directors will participate in the reviews, working with CPPs to assess both the quantitative and qualitative progress being made.

19. The qualitative assessment will consider improvements such as strengthened partnership working and the further engagement of businesses, the third sector and communities. The quantitative evidence of progress will be reported to communities around each September by Councils, on behalf of CPPs, and also presented to the Scottish Government. Through the work of the Improving Local Outcome Indicators Project (cf. Interim Report, para 24) CPPs will be progressively better able to identify and adopt more robust indicators and good practice in their use, so as to support effective performance management and reporting. On the basis of the annual review, which is likely to inform the budget setting processes of the CP partners, each SOA will then be rolled forward for a further year.
20. The move to an outcome based approach for public services will not be completed with the agreement of the 2nd phase SOAs between the Scottish Government and CPPs in May 2009 – important though that is. While real progress has been made since the agreement of the Concordat, this is only the start of a fundamental change in our ways of thinking and working, with inevitable needs for further advice and support for CPPs. The Interim Report identifies the many national partnership developments which provided advice and support during 2008-09. Now we intend to consider what further advice and support may be needed, in two key areas.
21. Firstly, we intend to consider the challenges arising from the need for Community Planning partners to be able to manage their performance so as to support their delivery of their SOAs. The challenges are likely to lie in the alignment of partners' performance management arrangements, and in the scrutiny of individual and joint Community Planning partner activity.
22. Secondly, we intend to consider capacity building activities and resources for the outcomes approach across the public sector, with an emphasis on support for CPPs. We intend to identify what is needed, what is available or planned, and what should be put in hand, in areas such as service planning, analytical capacity and leadership development.
23. The implementation of SOAs has been and will continue to be a learning process. Outcomes, by their nature, take time to deliver and the SOA process is still developmental. However, we believe that the Interim Report demonstrates a substantial body of progress and achievement at both the national and local levels, and in particular, that the SOA process now appears to be mobilising the potential of the Community Planning process.

**The Scottish Government
The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities
The Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers**

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