

LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT SHEET THREE

Relevance of indicators to the VCS in the East of England

Introduction

All principle authorities (county or unitary authorities) in the country are currently negotiating their LAA indicators with their regional Government Office.

This matters to the voluntary and community sector in the East of England. The indicators will go a long way to defining the future role of the voluntary sector. First, they will set out whether supporting a strong VCS is to be a local priority. Second, they will set the wider objectives in which the VCS can engage.

1. The strength of the voluntary and community sector

As you would expect from a list of nearly 200 measures, there is a specific indicator relating to the strength of the voluntary sector. National Indicator 7 - 'Environment for a thriving third sector' - is currently the 30th most popular indicator across the country and is intended to capture the contribution local statutory agencies make to the environment in which the VCS operates. It states that

"A vibrant, diverse, and independent third sector is a vital component of a fair and enterprising society ... Local statutory agencies can be influential in shaping the environment in which independent third sector organisations operate. This could be, for example, through their approaches to partnership working, consultation, funding relationships, or in the way that they commission and procure services."

Rather than measuring levels of actual involvement, the indicator will be scored according to how VCS organisations answer the question:

"How do the local statutory bodies in your local area influence your organisation's success?"

The indicator will be measured through a centrally-administered postal survey of relevant organisations. These will be selected randomly from a list, although local areas can use other data sources to provide further evidence. Unincorporated and unregulated organisations (e.g. small community-based organisations) will not be included. A baseline survey will be carried out in autumn 2008 with a follow-up in 2010.

Despite concerns about a potential gap between the objectives of the indicator and the data gathered to interpret it, this indicator is highly significant. It is a means of encouraging local authorities and other statutory agencies to include the VCS and have their performance measured accordingly. When taken in concert with other measures such as civic participation (NI3) and volunteering (NI6), it will form the lead Government measure of the strength of voluntary sector.

2. Indicators that relate to policy areas where VCS organisations operate

The national Local Area Agreement indicators cover all aspects of local service delivery. The selection of headline indicators for LAAs is intended to reflect local circumstances. As such it demonstrates which groups and needs should be given priority.

A strength of the VCS is in responding to local need, especially where statutory provision has traditionally been insufficient. That indicators are intended to relate to all local service delivery (rather than just that delivered by local authorities) is recognition of the strategic role of voluntary organisations. Getting the correct indicators in place will give the VCS more leverage in attracting the necessary funding and support to deliver services as well as having its role properly recognised.

The national list of indicators features a number of areas where VCS activities made be significant:

- Public health
- Support for vulnerable adults
- Care for children and young people
- Training and skills for hard to reach groups
- Support for carers

As you would some common areas on interest are emerging. For example, the ten most popular LAA indicators are currently:

- Net additional homes provided
- Working age population qualified to at least Level 2 or higher
- Effectiveness of child and adolescent mental health (CAMHs) services
- Obesity among primary school age children in Year 6
- 16+ current smoking rate prevalence
- Adult participation in sport
- Repeat incidents of domestic violence
- Under 18 conception rate
- Adapting to climate change
- Municipal waste land filled

Equally, there are indicators which authorities clearly do not regard are useful. For example, the least popular indicators, selected by no principle authorities across the country, include

- Skills gaps in the current workforce reported by employers
- People falling out of work and on to incapacity benefits
- Learners achieving a Level 1 qualification in literacy
- Adults in contact with secondary mental health services in employment
- Care leavers in suitable accommodation