

Checklist for challenging service improvement reviews

This checklist, originally found in the Audit Commission's [Changing Gear: Best Value Statement 2001](#), was adapted for the [PMMI project \(Performance Management, Measurement and Improvement\)](#) jointly delivered by the IDeA and Audit Commission in March 2005 to reflect the needs of all types of service or improvement reviews.

It is based on the building blocks for Best Value as outlined in *Changing Gear*

- Ownership of problems and willingness to change
- A sustained focus on what matters
- The capacity and systems to deliver performance and improvement
- Integrating best value into day-to-day management

Ownership of problems and willingness to change

- Do Members and senior managers lead the scoping process for service or improvement reviews and ensure reviews are ambitious, challenging and likely to deliver value for money?
- Does the review ensure the service is contributing to local and national priorities, (community strategies, e-government, procurement, equality and diversity, regeneration and the shared priorities, etc)?
- Are reviews sufficiently challenging? Do all elements of the service review challenge existing views and means of delivering the service and provide an honest and accurate assessment of what improvements are required?
- Does the review embrace external challenge; other authority peers, partners, stakeholders and service users from an early stage?
- Is a given review to be focused a particular performance problem or is it a fundamental review of a service or theme? Either way, is it clear what issue the review is designed to address?

A sustained focus on what matters

- As part of setting the scope for the review, are PIs, consultation, service plans, etc, drawn together to prioritise areas most needing improvement?
- Do scopes reflect users' experiences rather than traditional service boundaries?
- Is the the review making a sustained effort to ensure "hard-to-reach" and "low user" groups as well as established user groups are able to contribute?
- Are benchmarking exercises going deeper than PIs and cost data and asking "how" and "why"? Are benchmarking partners "top performers" or services with an improvement story to share?
- Are any "competition" or efficiency elements of the review open and thorough? Have optimum service levels and means of delivery been identified before trying to decide who is best placed to provide the service?

The capacity and the systems to deliver performance and improvement

- Are lessons learned from previous service reviews or Best Value reviews? Where service reviews have driven improvement – are successive reviews more strategic, stretching, cross-cutting and user-focused? If previous reviews faltered, are challenging aspects recognised and faced?
- Are review programmes co-ordinated with neighbouring authorities or partners, promoting efficiency in the review programme as well as, potentially, economies of scale in delivery or getting to grips with a problem that crosses organisational boundaries?
- Are the recommendations of reviews timed to coincide with the budget-setting and service planning cycle?
- Are implementation plans followed up? Is monitoring linked to key management systems?

Integrating performance management and improvement into the day job

- Are Members and front-line staff, those in direct contact with local people and users, involved from the start of the review?
- Are comparisons with other service providers encouraging new relationships and networks that support change and transfer “good practice” skills and techniques?
- Are service reviews helping to lift council performance and meet its key aims?
- Are senior manager and Members ensuring that each review results in measurable improvements, including some that users will notice? Are review action plans then part of service planning and linked to budgets?
- Are officers and managers held accountable for delivering improvement?
- Are action plans reflected in personal performance plans and targets with suitable incentives? Is appropriate action taken if improvements aren't achieved?