

# Performance management, measurement and information

Summary outputs from a series of IDeA/Audit Commission conferences

## Introduction

- 1 The first round of comprehensive performance assessments showed that performance management is a key factor in a council's overall performance.
- 2 The Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) and the Audit Commission are working together on a project looking at performance management, measurement and information, known as the PMMI project. The aim is to give local authorities some clear messages about what works, and in what circumstances.
- 3 As well as a series of learning events and a programme of action research, the PMMI project will lead to the production of a comprehensive tool for councils. The tool will help local authorities work out where they are, where they need to be and how to get there. More information on the tool will be given as the project develops.

## Performance management conferences

- 4 In July 2003, the IDeA and the Audit Commission ran three events as part of the PMMI project.
- 5 With participation from a wide range of councils the events drew out a number of key themes, through presentations, group discussions, Q&A sessions and written feedback from delegates.
- 6 The first output from the PMMI project is a report about what participants had to say on these six key themes, based on their own experiences of project management. It summarises their observations, the problems they face, their different approaches and their suggestions and ideas.

## The key themes

- 7 The key themes to emerge from the three events were that successful performance management:
  - is significantly affected by the wider context of regulation and national performance monitoring frameworks;
  - occurs when activity is comprehensive and co-ordinated so that the system becomes more than the sum of its parts;
  - requires effective political input;
  - is underpinned by the right infrastructure of resources, culture, IT, structure and systems;

- relies on the effective undertaking of tasks such as: setting targets, dealing with risk, maintaining focus, monitoring progress and managing performance; and
- may require a focus on process, as well as outcomes, supported by strong project management.

## Feedback on the PMMI project

- 8 Participants at the events were also asked to comment on the PMMI project itself, identifying four important characteristics for any planned tool:
  1. Above all, there should be one approach to performance management from all inspectorates.
  2. However, one size does not fit all – the tool must take into account the differences between councils and be flexible enough to have something for everyone, no matter what stage they are at.
  3. The tool should include examples of best practice, but these should be authoritative and proven to work.
  4. Although it is important to define performance management, councils need help with the ‘how’ not the ‘what’.

## What next?

- 9 The PMMI project is continuing, consolidating learning from the IDeA and the Audit Commission's previous work, carrying out research, sharing learning with local authorities and shaping the performance management tool.
- 10 We are keen to involve as many councils as possible in the project and are currently setting up dedicated PMMI web pages accessible from our websites.
- 11 In the meantime, if you would like to get involved, e-mail us at: [ihelp@idea.gov.uk](mailto:ihelp@idea.gov.uk)

**The Audit Commission** promotes the best use of public money by ensuring the proper stewardship of public finances and by helping those responsible for public services to achieve economy, efficiency and effectiveness, on behalf of the communities they serve.

The Commission was established in 1983 to appoint and regulate the external auditors of local authorities in England and Wales. In 1990, its role was extended to include the NHS. In April 2000, the Commission was given additional responsibility for carrying out best value inspections of local government services. During 2002 it introduced the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). In 2003, it took on responsibility for inspecting housing associations. Today its remit covers more than 15,000 bodies which between them spend nearly £125 billion of public money each year. The Commission operates independently and its findings and recommendations are communicated through a wide range of publications and events.

The Audit Commission is firmly committed to providing value for money in its own activities. Through Strategic Regulation we will focus our activity where the need for improvement is greatest.

**The Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA)** was established by and for local government in April 1999. Our mission is to support self-sustaining improvement from within local government.

The IDeA is a not-for-profit organisation and an advocate of the best in local government. We aim to deliver practical solutions to improve local government performance, develop innovative approaches to ensure the transfer of knowledge within local government and act on behalf of local government as a whole, building new platforms for joined-up, locally delivered services. To do this we offer a range of services, including tailored support to improve corporate and service performance, e-government services and spreading best practice ideas and experience through IDeA Knowledge.

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