

VSA Representative to the PMG Report for the Voluntary Sector Assembly

"The Performance Management Group is responsible for reporting progress to regional and national agencies such as Government Office West Midlands (on the Local Area Agreement), Department for Communities and Local Government (on LPSA") and locally to the Board, Chief Executive Group, Herefordshire Council Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees, Local organisations and networks, local people and communities."

Essentially the group has a remit to look at all the service targets either set by another body or by the authority itself and to monitor and evaluate progress towards achieving targets. They range from the big 'Vision' statements to the broken down 'bums on seats' type target.

In addition (and a more exciting aspiration) the group has a remit to influence methods of delivery and particularly to encourage, broker and facilitate a greater amount of cross department/cross sector collaboration and joint delivery. To help this, pooling of budgets is beginning to happen and the group will be increasingly looking at the best use of resources to achieve benefits across areas of work by improved partnership working.

The task of converting all the targets in all the strategic plans and agreements into 'Templates', which can reflect progress by using a traffic light system and is short and visually simple to interpret, has been a mammoth task. Chris Bucknell and Jennifer Watkins are to be commended for their work over a relatively short period to create a workable system. I have only been going to PMG meetings since July last year and the process has moved on and become more sophisticated in a short time. The quality of paperwork is excellent but a lot to read!

Even though the templates are good the meetings are on occasion frankly mind-blowing. The breadth of the remit is enormous - we travel from discussions around Housing and homelessness to Crime, from leisure take up to road accidents. Actually this is often easier from my perspective than the discussions around stodgier aspects like Government timetables, strategy documents and endless alterations to indicators, outcomes and targets. Agendas are long and inevitably discussions cannot be very in depth.

I feel that this is a very new committee, which has come a long way in a short time. It is challenging for all involved to make it achieve its full aspirations. In particular (for me at least) the exciting prospect of greater cross sector collaboration has not yet featured that highly.

The challenge for Will Lindesay and I (the other Voluntary sector representative) is to adequately represent the sector when inevitably we cannot know everything that is going on in the sector and where you most feel you are contributing and would like to contribute to the areas of work being discussed. As there are so many more statutory people at the PMG committee the tendency is to suggest names/departments known to them if a new task group needs to be set up. We are looking at this with the new VSA co-ordinator and I know the Infrastructure Consortium is considering it too.

I feel I have succeeded in scrutinising processes, made suggestions to improve its way of working and always challenge when no Voluntary sector representation is cited in a task and finish group - even if I cant name one!

One of the important tasks in the coming years will be ensuring pooled funds are effectively used to improve local services and allocation is made fairly available to Voluntary organisations where they are clearly best placed to deliver service improvements. I don't want to give the impression there will be lots of money floating around though - there won't be. Most that is available will be taken from somewhere else from projects or departments or staff that may not wish to lose it. Some difficult and unpopular decisions will be required.

It is important that you keep the VSA coordinator informed about what you do, the needs of your target groups and your resource needs. By knowing this we can establish where we are contributing to outputs already and where joint working and resourcing could improve services further.

The Performance Management Group has a very challenging role and much power. It has been a very steep learning curve for me but it is a fascinating emerging strategic group to participate in. I will do my best to continue representing the sector in this group and to answer any questions you may have about its work.

** A Local Area Agreement (LAA) is a formal agreement between Central Government and the local area on a set of priorities for improving the quality of life for local people. The agreement is made up of outcomes, indicators and targets aimed at delivering improvements in local services. The aim is to work together with a range of local partners to improve performance on an agreed set of outcomes. These outcomes are based on Herefordshire Partnership's Community Strategy.*

***LPSA = Local Public Service Agreement*