

# Bringing about a new relationship between central and local government and citizens

Progress report 2006 – 07



Lifting  
the burdens  
**task force**



# Contents

Foreword	2
Introduction	3
The work of the Lifting the Burdens Task Force	5
Emerging big issues	7
Conclusions	12
Appendices	
<b>Appendix A</b>	
Members of the Lifting the Burdens Task Force	15
<b>Appendix B</b>	
Policy Associates to the Task Force	16
<b>Appendix C</b>	
Review of the department for communities and local government: housing and planning	17
<b>Appendix D</b>	
13 steps to reduce performance management burdens	18
<b>Appendix E</b>	
Developing electoral registration performance indicators	19
<b>Appendix F</b>	
Review of the department for environment, food and rural affairs	20
<b>Appendix G</b>	
Comprehensive Area Assessment	21


# Foreword

The Lifting the Burdens Task Force – an independent practitioner body, was launched at last year’s LGA annual conference and has been operating now for nine months. It was set up to review the bureaucratic and performance management burdens that exist as a consequence of the current relationship between central and local government and identifies which requirements cause the most difficulty as a basis for agreeing a reduction of the burden with government departments.

When we started this work I thought it would have two components: technical work to identify the actual burden and where it could be reduced; and addressing the civil service mindset towards performance management and local government. However the more we explore the issue the more I realise there is a third, equally important aspect about encouraging council chief executives and leaders to engage with this issue so as to bring about the necessary change in mindset within local government.

It has been vividly brought to our attention during the first nine months of our work that a lot of local government is very dependent on Whitehall and quite reluctant to get rid of indicators as they serve as a mechanism for protecting services and providing undue leverage to resource areas of work which would otherwise not be considered a priority at local level. This has resulted in parts of local government actually requesting or supporting more indicators, ring fenced funding or guidance and therefore actually being complicit in the addition of extra burden. We need to turn this around or it could potentially undermine our efforts to secure more local determination for councils and a more equal and trusting relationship between central and local government.

This paper sets out our early findings in the form of challenges for central and local government and maps the way forward for the task force over the next 12 months. We are delighted to have the opportunity to present it at the LGA conference in Birmingham this year.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Frater". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly informal style.

Michael Frater  
Chairman, Lifting the Burdens Task Force

# Introduction

## Why we are where we are

The United Kingdom is one of the most highly centralised democracies in Europe. The degree of central control has been increasing over the past 25 years from the 1980s, to tame town halls and control public spending, to today, when a target or indicator gets put against every new initiative. Chronic underperformance in a small number of local authorities led Whitehall to believe that the central setting and monitoring of national targets would increase performance. Initiatives such as Best Value and Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) have certainly played a part in raising performance to a point where the majority of councils are now judged to be performing well or excellently, but such centrally driven, prescriptive, one-size fits all measures have started to inhibit the ability of local government to respond to local needs and preferences.<sup>1</sup>

The excessive burdens on local government today exist as a consequence of the current relationship between central and local government and the breakdown in trust that has occurred. The current nature of the central-local interaction is a 'parent-child' one which demands guidance, uses language such as 'earned autonomy,' and limits participation to commenting on evolving or existing policy, thereby perpetuating the level of burden. If the new performance management framework is to operate effectively then the relationship needs to change to one of 'adult-adult' so as to restore that trust that is required.

## Window of opportunity...

### But haven't we been here before?

Well yes, but Government has now publicly recognised the system has gone too far and is indeed now hindering improvement and innovation and damaging economic growth. The question is no longer if there should be a new framework and relationship that better suits local government's role in the twenty first century, but how do we bring it about?

At present 80 per cent of a council's reporting is up to central government. The task force hopes to be able to turn this round and reduce the volume of reporting down to at least 50 per cent by recommending the elimination, consolidation or automation of data requests and reporting information. The local government white paper sets out a commitment to reduce Performance Indicators (PIs) down to 200 and limit targets to 35 and 18 in the Local Area Agreements (LAA). There is also a government target to reduce the burden of inspection by 30 per cent.

We believe that now is the best opportunity we have had for a generation to bring about the changes we want to see in terms of reduced central prescription and 'softer' controls and bring about a more equitable, mature and trusting relationship between central and local government. Local government has built up an excellent track record and should have the confidence to be more assertive and positive about shaping the future for themselves.

---

<sup>1</sup> "The Lyons Inquiry into Local Government", March 2007.

## Challenges ahead...

*“There is a risk that the process of cutting centrally determined targets and indicators will not be fully reflected in the reduction of central controls, and that some central controls will instead ‘leak’ into other separate mechanisms, such as ring-fenced grants or soft controls which are less transparent and less easy to measure.”*

Lyons Report

Three decades of increasingly centralised micro-management and learnt behaviours cannot be undone in two years worth of work by a small group of local government chief executives and directors. It will require ownership and action by us all so that we do not risk any reduction in burdens being negated by fresh regulation or reporting mechanisms.

The Task Force is painfully aware that government departments and their agencies will find it incredibly hard to relinquish control. The risk is that back door methods will be found to circumvent the national indicator set. There is also a risk that after a few years, the targets and indicators will start to creep back, which is why the work of the Task Force is just as much about having a dialogue with government as it is about recommending practical changes. We have called for: a ‘one in one out’ rule to be applied to any future modifications to the national indicator set and LAA targets and the application of a collect once use often principle. We will also be giving further consideration to what gate-keeping mechanisms might need to be put in place to ensure that the scaled down model of performance reporting does not grow back again.

We are also aware that by changing the balance of control based on subsidiarity, that a new and very different role will emerge for councils and local partnerships, one where the drivers will come from communities and councillors rather than government. This will be challenging for some in local government who have become so accustomed over the years to government departments telling them how it should be. The challenge, as we set out in this paper to local government, will be to start developing now their own view of how indicators, targets and LAAs will look, without waiting for government. Only then will we have the foundations for a new dialogue and genuine agreements that truly reflect the desire for more local determination and choice.

*“...this lack of prominence (performance indicators) is seen within local authorities as an indication that the services are not relevant or important, and so not an area for investment.”*

Local authority respondent to consultation

# The work of the Lifting the Burdens Task Force

## The way we work

Targets and performance indicators are a significant theme in the Task Force's work as the government delivers its white paper commitments to reduce indicators to 200 and set up new LAAs with fewer targets. However, the scope of the Task Force is much more than that. Our terms of reference cover any piece of bureaucracy that gets in the way of innovative, effective and efficient service delivery at local level. This can range from inspections to guidance, grant restrictions to approval processes. It is a wide agenda, but gives us the opportunity to focus on those things that cause local government the most frustration and expense and therefore will have the biggest pay-back.

As well as wanting to achieve a reduction in the overall numbers of returns and requests from central government in line with the white paper commitment, the Task Force also wants to ensure that this equates to a reduction in staff time and resources in Whitehall and the freeing up of capacity within local authorities to reinvest back into front-line service delivery and the innovative and customer-focussed ways of working that the white paper and place-shaping agenda will require.

To achieve this, the Task Force is operating a rolling work programme of reviews based around government departments. As a spin off from these, one-off cross-cutting reports (eg LAAs) will also be published as well as official Task Force responses to consultations. Summaries of our published reports to date are attached as appendices to this report.

The Task Force is supported by a network of policy associates. Twenty heads of policy from across the country, who have links into wider local government networks provide the research and operational capacity for each specific project. Professional organisations, networks and authorities are asked to get involved via calls for evidence, roundtables and workshops.

Since its creation, there has been one change in membership on the task force, that of Mary Ney, chief executive of the London Borough of Greenwich whose work for London councils meant she had to withdraw from the Task Force. She has been replaced by Moira Gibb, the chief executive of the London Borough of Camden. We were sorry to lose Mary but delighted to have Moira onboard.

## Practitioner perspective

The unique contribution of the Task Force is that it is completely staffed and serviced by local government officers thereby bringing the practitioner perspective to the table. This first hand experience from people who have to manage performance and ensure resources and initiatives from various government departments and agencies are joined-up with those of partners and stakeholders has meant our recommendations are very well received by government.

Some of the key results to date include:

- in a letter to chief executives on the 18 May the Department for Communities and Local Government informed councils that it would be deleting nine of its BVPIs for 2007/08 as a direct result of the task force's recommendations;

- the planning white paper published on the 21 May takes forward our suggestions for a more streamlined, less bureaucratic local development framework process;
- the Electoral Commission agreed to drop three of its proposed new indicators as a result of the task force contribution to their consultation;
- we understand that our report to the Comprehensive Spending Review is proving to be a valuable tool for central government and the Audit Commission in defining the national outcomes and indicators.

The table below sets out the next phase of our work programme. We are grateful to all the local authorities who have contributed to our work so far and encourage you to keep doing so. If you have any examples of burdens in the following areas please do get in touch and let us know about them.

### Lifting Burdens Task Force Work Programme phase 2

Project	Scope	Timing
<b>DCMS</b> Carolyn Downs and Irene Lucas	Data collection, culture and LAAs, regional commentaries, licensing, funding	Publication at end July
<b>LAA</b> Andrew Lightfoot	Financial administration of LAAs, roles and responsibilities of government offices and Audit Commission	Publication summer 2007
<b>DFES</b> John Coughlan	Performance management, inspection, Field Forces, ICT, initiatives	Launch June Call for evidence July Publication Nov/Dec 2007
<b>HMT</b> Stephen Jones	To be determined	Launch summer 2007
<b>Dept. Health</b> Moira Gibb	To be determined	Launch summer 2007
<b>Home Office</b> Philip Bostock	To be determined	Launch summer 2007
<b>DTI and DfT</b>	To be determined	Launch autumn/winter 2007



# Emerging big issues

## For central government

*“Not everything that counts can be counted... and not everything that can be counted, counts.”*

Albert Einstein

As we see it from our work to date there are five big challenges for central government.

### Mindset

Ministers may have widely accepted that the regulatory regime has gone too far and is now inhibiting the improvement of public services. This view seems to be shared by senior civil servants too, but there is still a mindset that the burden is every other government department's fault, not their own, and that central government still knows best.

Take for example the eighteen statutory attainment targets for schools. Whilst they guarantee a focus on attainment, they also set up a rigidity and imbalance from the start, when the objective is to create more flexibility and space for what matters locally. In some areas, other priorities may be just as, or even more important for children than educational attainment. The government needs to recognise that one size does not and cannot fit all, and command and control is not the best way to get results.

### Trust

Key to shifting the current central-local relationship and making the new performance management framework work

is trust. If central government involved practitioners much more in the design of new policies from an early stage, it would demonstrate a level of trust and openness about what is happening that would help transform the relationship from parent-child to adult-adult. All too often local government becomes involved in policy development far too late in the day. This is not the most conducive way to design and deliver effective and sustainable public services.

Trust is also essential if government is going to be able to reduce its performance and data demands, and maintain that reduction. At present government departments request detailed information that a director or council chief executive would not expect to see. For the new performance management framework to be a success, government and ministers have to stop believing they are responsible and accountable for things that are clearly the responsibility of local government and focus on what their national priority outcomes are.

### Leave space for the local

We also challenge government to resist the temptation to step back in and fill the void created by the reduction in central controls so as to create space for local priorities.

To create the space for the local priorities the Task Force suggests:

- an immediate halving in the volume of inspection. For example 17 Full-Time Employees are employed in an excellent authority to service a light-touch inspection regime (not including councillor time, partners' time and specialists);

- rebalance the reporting ratio from 80:20 in favour of central government to at least 50:50;
- for the 200 indicators to measure what matters, so we do not spend time and effort on meaningless or duplicate activities;
- a reduction in ring-fenced grants and for all area based funding to be channelled through the LAA.

### Language

If we are to have a more mature dialogue then the language used also has to change. For example:

#### **‘Postcode Lottery’**

An inevitable consequence of less central prescription and more local choice is that priorities will be different in each area. This is often referred to as a ‘postcode lottery’ by the media and opposition politicians which implies a matter of chance, whereas if the language used was that of ‘local determination’ it would more appropriately reflect the fact that the difference is a matter of local choice. However to be credible, local discretion and choice has to be a reality.

#### **‘Earned autonomy’ and ‘freedoms and flexibilities’**

Use of these phrases puts local government squarely in the position of supplicant, we believe we should talk the language of ‘local autonomy’. Local government has a democratic mandate to take the lead in its area and local authorities are independent corporate legal entities.

#### **‘Risk’**

The new CAA talks a lot about ‘risk assessment’. Such terminology has connotations which could be misleading and

off-putting to partners and the public. Something like: ‘prospects for success’ or ‘likelihood of delivering outcomes’ would be more positive and appropriate.

#### **‘Delivery chain’**

To refer to local authorities as being part of the government’s delivery chain also implies a lack of understanding; fails to recognise local government’s direct democratic mandate and implies that councils are an agent of central government. In areas such as child protection for example, the chain of command stops at the cabinet member and director for children’s services.

### Joined-up government

Time and time again our consultations with local government over the past year have highlighted that the biggest ‘burden’ for local authorities is not the collating or reporting of data, but the sheer number of surveys and reports they have to complete because of government departments operating in silos. Eliminating duplication and consolidating effort so there is just one single method for data collection in an area would go a long way to reducing the burden on local authorities. For instance: there are four methods for collecting housing information; three methods for calculating cultural performance, the various regimes of each NDPB; and five different ways of measuring thefts from vehicles to name just a few. The result is a huge duplication of effort on the ground and in government and results are then often conflicting, misleading or not useful at all because they use slightly different definitions, source data, time periods or calculations.

## For local government

*“Recognise the right and the ability of local communities to make their own choices, confident in their own competence, and in the knowledge of their own preferences.”*

Lyons

There are also five challenges for local government to overcome if they are also to contribute to bringing about a shift in the relationship between central and local government, thereby freeing up local authorities to better respond to local needs and manage public services more effectively.

### Stop hiding behind PIs

In discussing PIs with local government colleagues, some tension has emerged between the rationale of removing less than robust performance indicators and retaining the measure as a means of getting local authorities to prioritise an area of work which would not otherwise be considered a local priority. The Task Force is unanimous in the view that PIs should not exist to provide undue leverage to resource areas of work considered low priority at a local level by elected members.

We appreciate that the reason some local authorities often asked for more guidance and prescriptive performance regimes is because they are not confident in what they are supposed to be doing. Asking for more guidance is not the solution and will not help local government regain a sense of autonomy. The Task Force believes that the presumption should be that there is no need for guidance, and a strong case needs to be

put forward for the introduction of any guidance in the future. Chief executives and council leaders need to ensure that they are aware of and agree with what is being done or said in the authority's name when a government 'silo' consults directly with the relevant local authority 'silo'.

### Focus on performance

Reducing the amount of reporting to central government should not be mistaken as local government being allowed to take its foot off the pedal. Quite the reverse, less central control means councils must focus even more on their performance and improvement. This will require those other than performance professionals being appropriately involved, (in particular directors, chief executives and councillors) in the continuing performance management of their authorities.

The National Indicator Set will not be the only performance information, the only focus of interest for the LAA, or the only assurance of performance, but it will be the only information councils will be required to report on to government. Beyond this, there will still be information we as councils will need to collect to manage our business and be able to report to our communities in a meaningful way on how we are doing. By not waiting to see where central government will go, and setting out our own agenda, we can avoid entering a 'cold turkey' phase when central control is withdrawn.

### Measure what matters most

With only 200 national indicators and 35 + 18 LAA targets for inspectorates and the public to judge us by, robust and

quality local data is going to be more important than ever. It is therefore going to be vital that the most appropriate LAA targets are agreed and the right things are measured. For example, is it better to measure the speed at which a planning application is processed, or the quality and satisfaction with the process? And do we really need to all be spending time and effort measuring the height of kerbstones? These should be decided locally in consultation with local communities about what matters to them.

In designing local indicators councils need to ask:

- would we collect this information if we didn't have to?
- is it robust and auditable?
- is the indicator unique or does it duplicate information captured elsewhere?
- is the indicator outcome focussed and of value in improving performance
- is the cost of collating the information disproportionate to the benefit?

And most importantly;

- is this something the public will see as a priority and understand and identify with?

Councils need to be spending much more time performing and reporting back to the community. This means we must understand: what matters to them; what it is about our performance they want to know; and how best to provide that information.

## Public engagement

The trade-off for less central accountability must be more local accountability. This will require engagement and communication in a way that is meaningful, inclusive and coherent. Just as there is a call for central government to join up more, so must local government departments when it comes to public engagement and consultation so that we do not over-burden the public and add to what is often referred to as 'consultation fatigue'. The Task Force believes that a single community engagement strategy, which is subject to local determination, would be more productive than numerous individual strategies.<sup>2</sup>

Improving engagement is also necessary because by measuring what matters to the local community, different areas will choose different priorities and tailor services differently to meet local need. The majority of the public would not mind if councils provided different levels of service, so long as they were consulted<sup>3</sup>, and then informed as to the decisions that were taken as a result. Rather than allowing this diversity and difference to be seen as a negative, or 'postcode lottery', it should be celebrated as the demonstration of local determination. Research also shows that being kept informed increases levels of satisfaction.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Review of department for communities and local government: housing and planning, LBTF, Feb 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Ben Page, Could Lyons' number ever come up? LGC 5th April 2007

<sup>4</sup> Ipsos MORI, Best Value User Satisfaction Surveys 2006: initial topline report for single and upper tier local authorities, CLG 2007.

## Leadership

Attitudes and behaviours learnt over the past 25 or more years of growing central government micro-management and control, have been identified as the main barrier to innovation and the take-up of existing tools such as the well-being power in the Local Government Act 2000<sup>5</sup>. But it is only local government itself that can change this and turn local authorities from being constrained and permissive into innovative catalysts for delivering community outcomes.

None of the above challenges can be overcome without strong political and managerial leadership within local government. An ever increasing emphasis on partnership working, place-shaping, improvement, participation and outcomes will require bold decisions and a culture that supports and encourages new and innovative ways of working.

*“People are spending a lot of time feeding the performance machinery rather than focussing on outcomes for service users.”*

Andrew Cozens – I&DeA

<sup>5</sup> CLG, Formative Evaluation of the Take-up and Implementation of the Well Being Power – Annual Report 2006.



# Conclusions

From our first nine months work the Task Force has identified three main challenges:

- the technical task of identifying burdens to be scrapped;
- controlling micro-management culture in central government;
- the supplicant, 'tell us what to do' culture in parts of local government.

The Task Force has highlighted what it feels are some of the changes in attitudes and behaviours required both centrally and locally around performance management. Letting go of control is understandably difficult, and managing in a more flexible environment presents its challenges. But if local government is ever going to be given greater autonomy, then it is essential that we rise to these challenges and demonstrate our ability to be ambitious, innovative and capable. Now is the time for central and local government to start trusting each other and have a sensible and grown-up dialogue to see through the white paper commitment for genuine devolution, deregulation and local solutions which are ultimately more sustainable. This will raise significant issues about the nature and scale of regulation and inspection.

Over the next 12 months the Task Force aims to complete our series of departmental reviews. The big spending department of the Department for Education and Skills, Home Office, Department of Health and Treasury will be followed by the Department for Work and Pensions, Department for Transport, and the Department of Trade and Industry. We will continue to respond to performance management consultations and to input into the design and delivery of the new performance management framework, inspection regime and LAAs as well as our extensive conference presentation programme.

Please continue to be involved in the work of the Task Force; let us not waste this opportunity to bring about a real and meaningful reduction in burden for local government.

**For further information about the Task Force and to download our publications and calls for proposals, please visit [www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1508116](http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1508116)**







# Appendix A Members of the Lifting the Burdens Task Force

## Michael Frater

Chief Executive, Nottingham City Council  
Chair

## Philip Bostock

Chief Executive, Exeter City Council

## Eammon Boylan

Deputy Chief Executive, Manchester City Council

## John Coughlan

Director of Children's Services, Hampshire County Council

## Stephen Jones

Director for Finance and Performance, LGA

## Carolyn Downs

Chief Executive, Shropshire County Council

## Andrew Lightfoot

Deputy Chief Executive (Regeneration & Technical), Blackburn  
with Darwen Borough Council  
Convenor of Policy Associates network

## Irene Lucas

Chief Executive, South Tyneside MBC

## Moira Gibb

Chief Executive, London Borough of Camden

## Janet Russell

Director of Environment and Transportation and Property,  
Kirklees Metropolitan Council  
Member of the Better Regulation Commission

## Rachel Gapp

Head of Policy and Performance, Lifting the Burdens Task  
Force

## Shadow Members:

### Sarah Sturrock

Deputy Director, Local Government Quality & Performance,  
Department for Communities and Local Government

### Simon Ridley

Deputy Director, HM Treasury

# Appendix B Policy Associates to the Task Force

**Bruce Luxton**  
Exeter City Council

**Tom Whiting**  
London Borough of Harrow

**Chris Lawrence-Pietroni**  
Hampshire County Council

**Stephen Capaldi**  
Oxfordshire County Council

**Graeme Brown**  
Government Office South East

**Andrew Donaldson**  
Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council

**Jenny Haworth**  
Stockton Borough Council

**Robert Huntington**  
Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council

**Lesley-Ann Fenton**  
Chorley Borough Council

**Andrew Hall**  
Nottingham City Council

**Michael Bowles**  
Sheffield City Council

**Dean Stokes**  
London Borough of Camden

**Paul Najsarek**  
London Borough of Harrow

**James White**  
Sheffield City Council

**Richard Partington**  
Telford and Wrekin Council

**Jason Lowther**  
Birmingham City Council

**Sarah Henry/ Tom Stannard**  
Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council

**Alex Wilson**  
St Edmondsbury District Council

**Wendy Marston**  
Shropshire County Council

**Robin Andrew**  
Cornwall County Council

# Appendix C Review of the department for communities and local government: housing and planning

The housing and planning report calls for unnecessary performance indicators to be abolished and puts forward a series of modifications to the planning system and community engagement. It also calls for a more robust link between planning and the Local Area Agreement (LAA) process.

The Planning White Paper – the government’s response to the Barker review on land use planning, provides a timely opportunity for the Task Force’s recommendations to be implemented. A range of other initiatives in the housing and planning area such as: the proposal to create Communities England; the Elton Review on regulatory requirements for social landlords and the Cave review on social housing regulation, indicate a wider recognition of the need to reduce bureaucracy.

Early experience and Task Force consultations with councils and housing and planning organisations revealed how systems, intended to be flexible and respond to local needs, do in fact create more burdens because of excessive national prescription. Further, albeit minor adjustments, must be made to improve the system’s efficiency and promote good planning, in line with recommendations in the Barker review.

The Task Force report therefore recommends:

- The removal of the independent examination of Statement of Community Involvement
- Introduce a single authority wide engagement strategy
- Documentation requirements are reduced
- The sustainability assessment process is reviewed and streamlined

- Regulation 25 consultation stage is removed
- The measuring and monitoring of LDF be mainstreamed into the LAA process
- Volume of PPS and guidance be reduced
- Planning Delivery Agreements are rolled out
- Related Development Policy Documents to be prepared and examined concurrently
- Immediate deletion of BV219a and c
- The amendment of BV64, BV106, BV109a-c, BV202, BV203, BV212, BV213, BV214

The Task Force believes that the development of the next generation of LAAs can and should be a catalyst for a more dynamic and equitable framework reflecting key priorities articulated locally. Focus on those and that should be how you measure the effectiveness of a local authority. However, government should not perceive an LAA merely as a performance management tool. Its strength lies in being able to deliver innovative, joined-up, quality services. The report therefore calls for the mainstreaming of LDF monitoring into the LAA process.

The report also reveals that the biggest concern and burden on local authorities is the duplication of effort involved in the collation and reporting of housing and homelessness indicators. At present there are four different surveys that collect this information, each with slightly different definitions, targets and timeframes. The Task Force calls on CLG to establish an agreement with other government departments and agencies to ‘collect once use often’ to maximise the re-use of data and minimise the requirements on local authorities.

# Appendix D 13 steps to reduce performance management burdens

This report was our contribution to the Comprehensive Spending Review process because of its role in determining the national outcomes and indicators which form the basis for the new performance management framework as outlined in the Local Government White Paper 2006.

The report pulls together the more general and strategic points about targets, indicators and inspection that have arisen from our review work and suggests practical ways in which duplicate, overlapping and unnecessary requirements can be eliminated as a means of reducing the burden and report on what really matters.

The 13 steps are:

1. Only set an absolute minimum number of national indicators through the Comprehensive Spending Review process and apply a "one in one out rule" for any future modifications.
2. That the exemptions for additional data returns and indicators over and above the 200 are proportionate and do not add further burden to local authorities.
3. Place a cap on the number of output indicators required to support the 200 PIs. A maximum of two such indicators should be used in respect of each outcome measured.
4. Ensure indicators are clear and unambiguous in their definition and applicability in order to eliminate perverse or unintended outcomes.
5. Remove the requirement to report on indicators which are regarded as irrelevant because they do not provide any useful management information.
6. Collect once, use often. Government departments and other agencies should work in partnership to ensure they reduce duplication.
7. Ensure a single comprehensive satisfaction survey encompassing all National Indicator Set customer focus Performance Indicators.
8. Not all performance management information needs to be reported to central government and may be more appropriate for local adoption as part of their own performance management.
9. All other performance management frameworks for local government outside of the LAA and National Indicator Set are removed and LAA monitoring to be reduced.
10. Establish a more robust link between the Local Area Agreement approach and the continuing requirement to report to central government on performance.
11. Ensure all government departments and agencies use the LAA to pool all area based funding, thereby providing far greater alignment of priorities, strategies and resources to deliver improvements.
12. Change the mindset from one where local government has to justify the smallest 'enabling measure' to one where Central Government has to justify not allowing flexibility.
13. Self-regulation and peer review for the best performers. Inspectorate activity limited to those 'at risk' or failing.

# Appendix E Review of the department for environment, food and rural affairs

The review of Defra highlights streamlining possibilities in animal welfare and air quality, as well as identifying potential hurdles ahead for those involved in food control and tackling climate change. It argues that Defra sometimes overlooks local authorities' environmental role, even though they have a direct impact on the local environment and are often leading the agenda on key issues such as recycling and climate change.

The report welcomes moves by Government to provide a national steer on environmental priorities, such as producing a Joint Environmental Statement with the Local Government Association, and says that cutting performance indicators for staff in central and local government will help provide focus.

Waste was identified as a prime area for burden reduction, the report urges Defra to delete 15 performance indicators and review nine others. For example, the report raises concerns over the time-consuming requirement for local authorities to assess the proportion of land that has below-acceptable levels of rubbish three times a year as being virtually meaningless, as the conditions of streets can change within hours of an inspection. The recommendation is to remove this requirement and to leave it to local judgement to determine the level of performance and satisfaction with local environmental quality.

Other areas of concern raised in the report are the potential extra administrative burden on local authorities dealing with an increase in the number of animal establishments brought under the scope of licensing provisions; the need to make air quality monitoring more meaningful to reflect issues like extended unusual weather or major road works; and for the Government to act consistently to avoid piecemeal indicators and policies which could adversely impact on councils' efforts to tackle climate change.

On the issue of climate change, the report urges the Government to ensure that performance indicators should be efficient and carbon emissions should not be counted twice under different initiatives; climate change measures should not be used as a justification to measure other policy goals; any measure should be under the direct control of local government; and that any Government-sponsored building programmes, such as Building Schools for the Future, should include adequate financial provision to enable the additional upfront investment to build low/zero carbon buildings.

# Appendix F Developing electoral registration performance indicators

The LBTF's view of these proposals is that the Electoral Commission must make a very strong and positive case to justify the imposition of such extensive new burdens on all local authorities. We currently do not feel that such a case is being put forward and would welcome the opportunity to discuss our concerns with the Commission at the earliest opportunity.

The explicit driver for the introduction of this first phase of a wholly new performance indicator and performance management framework is improvement. Whilst no reasonable argument can be advanced to object to seeking improvement in public services, the LBTF is keen to ensure that the proposed solutions (in this case, a completely new regime of performance indicators in advance of a widespread new performance management framework) are themselves reasonable, practicable and proportionate and do not impose unacceptable new centrally imposed burdens on local authorities.

The consultation document adduces no evidence of significant incompetence, irregularity or inefficiency in the electoral registration function of local government – a function it has been carrying out very well for well over 100 years. Yet these proposals seek to impose a significant new burden of central performance reporting and performance management. Whilst there will inevitably be areas for improvement, such a solution may well be seen as disproportionate and unreasonably burdensome for the vast majority of efficient and well performing local authorities. As to the details of the eleven proposed indicators, the majority of them involve local authority election staff in the collection of new information or in the re-interpretation of existing information and many are ambiguous or uncertain in

their meaning and scope. Of the proposed indicators, particularly burdensome examples include:

**Indicator 3** (Recorded errors on the register – number and nature of clerical errors recorded at the last major election/annually). In this case the collection of the required data would be very onerous (during the time of maximum activity in the run-up to an election) against a background of extremely low incidence of such errors and the variety of different software used across the country will mean the data will be generated in a variety of different formats.

**Indicator 8** (Customer satisfaction rating of the electoral registration service) requires a new annual survey to be undertaken which is resource intensive and of minimal value particularly as those who will not complete annual registration forms are most unlikely to reply to a customer satisfaction survey.

**Indicators 9, 10 and 11** all require new narrative reports to be produced, presumably annually, on issues such as validating the accuracy of the register, encouraging participation and preventing fraud. These will all be burdensome, of limited objective value and will feed a new 'industry' of centralised control and assessment within the Electoral Commission.

At the present time LBTF is firmly of the view that the proposals are over-centralised, disproportionate and indiscriminate in the burdens they will impose on local government.

# Appendix G Comprehensive Area Assessment consultation

The Lifting the Burdens Task Force appreciates this opportunity to comment on the transition to CAA.

We welcome the assessment of outcomes approach and increased local input as it will make CAA less of a one-size-fits-all inspection and hopefully more meaningful to the public. We also agree with the move to inspect 'place' and the customer experience, although we do not underestimate the challenge this presents. The CAA must be a catalyst for improvement and to do this it must be the only performance framework from central government and feed into partner's regimes and results rather than the other way round.

However, we question the skills and capacity of the Audit Commission to assess future 'risk'. Assessing 'risk' will require a far greater level of sophistication in analysis and more subjectivity than traditionally auditors have provided. For such an assessment to be credible and not subject to endless legal challenges, it must include people with the experience of running larger and more complex organisations. We therefore suggest that senior peers from PCTs and the Police for example, are involved in making such informed judgements.

It also needs to be made clearer who is being judged and how they will be held to account. Councils are questioning if the 'duty to co-operate' is sufficient to ensure mutual accountability and partners take action if they are judged to be 'poor'. How will the public have confidence that the assessment will be acted upon? Councils are understandably nervous about the prospect of being held to account for the poor performance of others. Complex governance

arrangements and partnership working in two tier areas make ownership and accountability even more difficult. The Audit Commission should not underestimate the amount of training and cultural change that they will have to engage in if this is going to work successfully.

We also feel that the language of 'Risk' could stifle innovation, which is by its nature 'high-risk', and therefore put off some partners and be misleading to the public. We would advise the use of much less emotive language such as 'prospects for success', which is much more positive and still covers the same issues.

The Local Government White Paper places LSPs and LAAs at the heart of future assessment and partnership working. If the LAA is the only place for the agreement of national targets and local priorities then the position of LAAs in the CAA must be central.

We would welcome more clarity on how the roles of Government Office "Partnership directors" and Audit Commission "relationship managers" will differ? LAAs are currently severely over-monitored and there is the potential for significant overlap, blurring of responsibilities or unnecessary duplication which will place undue burdens on local authorities. The Task Force is conducting some specific research in this area and we will send you our recommendations in July.

Finally, given all this, we have concerns about how CAA will actually deliver a real reduction in Burden. At the moment it feels like it is just shifting to a more local focus.

For further information please contact  
the Local Government Association at  
Local Government House  
Smith Square, London SW1P 3HZ

or telephone LGconnect for all your LGA queries on  
020 7664 3131  
Fax 020 7664 3030  
Email [info@lga.gov.uk](mailto:info@lga.gov.uk)

For a copy in braille, in larger print or audio tape  
contact LGconnect

## **promoting better local government**

LGA code F/CA257

© Local Government Association June 2007

ISBN 978 1 84049 579 9

Printed on Revive uncoated paper which is 100% recycled

Published by LGA Publications

Local Government Association, Local Government House, Smith Square, London SW1P 3HZ

Printed by Litho Techniques, 46-50 Godstone Road, Whyteleafe, Surrey CR3 0EA