

## Annual Council Reporting Framework for Welsh Social Services

Newsletter No. 4 February 2010

### Welcome to the 4<sup>th</sup> ACRF Newsletter and the first for 2010

Since our last newsletter, work within authorities has continued at an excellent pace. Authorities have taken the framework for developing their first Annual Report and have applied a project management approach to the task in hand.

Early feed back from the LA project teams indicate that, whilst in the first year the task of compiling evidence grids is challenging and time consuming, applying the discipline as outlined in the toolkit, delivers more than simply the production of evidence for the overarching supporting statements. Many have found that the process of compiling the evidence promotes a culture within their organisation of questioning structure and delivery of services as well as how future commissioning and planning is carried out and particularly the hard evidence that should be used for such decisions.

Additional support days for authorities (commissioned by the SSIA) are continuing through Jeff Hobden and many of the 'tips for facilitators' and 'evidence grids' sections in this newsletter, are taken from this work.

Recently, SSIA delivered 3 regional briefing sessions for Scrutiny Members. The purpose of the briefings was to appraise Members with responsibility in social care, as to how managers were preparing to produce their first Annual Report. The briefings also set out the recent legislation that sees the responsibility for the production of the report sit squarely at the feet of each Statutory Director of Social Services within an authority. More specifically, the briefing began to pose some of the issues that Members (scrutiny and executive) might want to consider when studying the draft report. The message given was that whilst each Director has the responsibility for producing the Report, ultimately the council should accept responsibility for driving the improvement priorities contained within the Report.

Links with CSSIW have continued through SSIA's inclusion in the work of the Review and Modernisation Group, as well as the continued presence of Margaret Provis on the ACRF Programme Board. Work has been undertaken by CSSIW with support from WAO to develop a framework for collating information from the Annual Report as well as evidence from reviews, targeted inspections and intelligence from other inspectorates such as ESTYN. All these differing strains of intelligence will be used to form the basis for the letter which will be sent to councils and will set out the plan for the coming 12 months engagement and the outline for a further 24 months.

A number of authorities have raised the issue as to what the relationship between RBA and the Annual Reporting process could be. We have brokered some work between WAO, Gwynedd and Torfaen to look at the relationship between them. This could also help support the link to the corporate Outcome Agreements under the new WPI, which will have a focus on the RBA outcome approach.

The information in the next sections of the Newsletter will be reformatted and included in the next version of the toolkit.

## Evidence Grids

Following on from the series of workshops delivered by SSIA to authorities last summer, a number of Directors suggested that it would be useful to agree a standard template for compiling the evidence grids and in September following consultation, ADSSCymru agreed to the use of the standard template. This will allow for a baseline in bench marking from which to build in the second year of reporting and for the sharing of information and collaboration opportunities between authorities. One key to the successful completion of the grids is to have the ownership and senior management buy-in of the process. Whilst some officers have viewed the process as difficult and somewhat time consuming, experience to date with some councils shows that where the purpose of completing the grids is understood well by staff, the resulting grids are far more effective and robust. Feedback from a number of Directors also shows that the process is significantly improving the relationship, understanding and ownership between performance management and service delivery.

## How to avoid weaknesses in the Evidence Grids.

Those making a serious evaluation of your councils Performance Management and improvement planning and activity, will study the grids very carefully. That is where your relative strength/weakness in that regard will emerge, much more than in the overview.

When checking Evidence Grids, there are some common “weaknesses” to look for. These are things that can easily be changed and make your Grids much more robust and useful. You’ve put a lot of time in so you want to get the most useful outcome you can.

Any one can check this; you don’t have to be an expert in the relevant field. The following seem the commonest weaknesses seen so far.

**Unexplained notes:** There is a temptation to just note something that you think is significant, intending to come back later and expand it. If you don’t expand it you are left with a meaningless statement. The following is a real and typical example of a statement under Deployment.

### Work with Voluntary Organisations

Which could mean “We have been very successful in our *Work with Voluntary Organisations*” or “Our *Work with Voluntary Organisations* has not achieved the results we hoped for”. If you don’t want the reader to make false assumptions about which you meant, make sure you have expanded. Verbs and adverbs are useful!

**Missing Judgement words:** The key to Deployment is to give simple judgements not just describe what you are doing. You must say something about what you have done but you must also include words like ‘successfully, robust, effective, unsuccessful, good, poor, weak’ etc so that readers are aware of your overall judgement as to how you are doing. Potentially everyone is a reader, including the Head of Service and Director who will be trying to ensure that their Overall judgements track back to specific activities. Without judgement words like these, everything has to be rethought from scratch and the work done to analyse effectiveness is lost. At worst you could end up having to do it again, at best the views of the original group which did the analysis will be lost. The last thing you want to do is waste time in that way!

**Forgetting to include planned action as well as things already done:** It is important to remember that taking a decision to take some action is an action in its own right. If you have decided to review something you think may be a problem, then that decision is an action that could be recorded in your Deployment column. You should be able to prove that action in the form of minutes or memos that show who took the decision and when. Often this sort of action is being omitted from the Grids because people think they should wait for something more substantive to emerge. Not so. Deciding to review something, planning action based on a review, determining who will take action etc are all actions in their own right, and show that you are not just talking about a problem but actually taking steps to resolve it. Your Results column can then show how far you've gone with it.

**Noting necessary improvements without saying how they will be addressed:** Part of the point of doing the Analysis grids is to identify things that you need to improve. Noting these improvement possibilities is good. However, to be credible, you should indicate what you will do about it. That might mean just saying that a specific management meeting will consider what to do, or that it will be incorporated into the next version of a strategy or plan. If you don't say anything to show what action will be taken, the reader may think that you have only just thought of something and won't actually act on it. For example, "There is an issue relating to % of non-attendance at training events across internal/external organisations" could be just a world-weary comment on something you accept will never change, or a good recognition of a problem that is going to be addressed. Unless you indicate how it will be addressed the reader will assume it's the first. Try to identify the improvement "actions" you will take in the coming year, not just the "priorities" for improvement, and make them as SMART as you can.

**Forgetting dates:** Many things are work in progress, and some things you want to include are part of long-term developments. It is important to say when something started if it is a long time ago, and when you anticipate it being completed. Sometimes you need to report the date a specific milestone was achieved on the way to full implementation. If you can link dates to when you think you will be able to see results you will save yourself time in the following year because you will already have identified something to look for.

**Letting the basic columns get blurred:** It is worth checking that the people doing each Grid have grasped the basics.

- Approach is what you think the fundamental management tasks are and the standards you should be achieving
- Deployment is what you are setting out to do to implement those fundamentals and how well you consider yourself to be doing
- Results - the outcomes or outputs you are achieving.

There is often some blurring between Deployment and Results and if in doubt make sure the point is in one or the other. Choose whichever makes your judgement clearer and more defensible. If in doubt, err on the side of Deployment because that usually comes across more strongly. Be careful of blurring Approach and Deployment. If you have Deployment statements starting “We will” or “We aim”, then almost always they are not Deployment statements at all. If in doubt re-read Chapter 3 of the Toolkit!

**Over-elaborating:** You may not have a result for every Deployment statement, try to have enough to show that you have a grasp of what you are achieving and possibly that you have identified any weaknesses in your data. Similarly, on Evidence, make sure you have the key material and can justify all your key points under Deployment and Results, but be clear *why* you have listed everything in the Evidence record.

**Missing out the figures:** This one is probably just a comment on the stage we are at as I write this. You must include all your KPI's somewhere in the Grids. This might be in the Grid or in a separate statement but they must all be somewhere. There is a temptation to leave this until the end of March and put them in later. If you do this though, remember - it is your judgement of what the PI's mean that is most important. There is a danger that leaving all the figures till last will lead to you omitting the judgements. You will be thinking about these judgements continuously through the year, every time you get a performance report. It should be easy to include your judgements on the PIs as you review them through the year rather than risk leaving it all to the last minute. Remember that you must check your judgements against the most up to date PI data before you publish.

**Methodology:** Lastly, the RADAR methodology has been recommended for compiling evidence grids as it allows for a fairly straight forward approach to setting out goals, how you are tackling issues, your success and what evidence for your statement is. All Councils have chosen to use the methodology in some way or another. Feedback is clear that it is when the grids are completed “live” by small cross-organisational groups of knowledgeable staff that the process becomes creative. If you take the opportunity of bringing together the operational and performance management disciplines within your departments to work together in this way, new understandings and insights seem to emerge and key improvement actions are identified and agreed.

**The Vault of Evidence:** Torfaen have been working with the Data Unit to build an accessible and logical storage/filing mechanism within Ffynnon based on the CSSIW Domains which they are using to store their evidence. We can supply more information on this if you require it.

## Tips for Facilitators

1. You are in charge not just supporting others. In order to do this you must ensure that you are thoroughly familiar with the methodology yourself before attempting to lead others through it. Make sure you use all the available support if you need it (SSIA, SCP Consult, peers from other LAs). Checking things out with somebody else can save a lot of time and frustration.
2. Start with Approach, then Deployment, then Results. It might be the case that you do not have evidence for every line (although you should have for most!!!) e.g.

3. It's a good idea to set a timetable - 30 minutes to get the Approach statements, hour and a half to get first draft of Deployment down etc. Allow additional time if the subject matter is particularly difficult or contentious - rushing the work without allowing people time to talk through the issues will only mean you will be likely to revisit them more often than is necessary.
4. It's not easy working out what goes where to start with, but be firm. If it's a good point that you don't want to lose when you get to the right column, make a quick note and come back to it later.
5. Don't let the discussion become general! You are not there to update each other on specific projects etc. nor to spend a lot of time debating what you might do in future. Capture the important point or the possible improvement and move on.
6. Don't let everyone turn to the most senior person present and let them do all the talking. Everyone's perspective is valuable. The truth is probably a compromise between views.
7. You will have to interpret what is said and check back with people that you have understood it correctly.
8. Make sure you get the point down on the template before moving on. Make the group wait for you to do this. If you don't you will never remember what was said and your work will be wasted.
9. People often don't recognise what is good or bad practice. Try to help them. Something strong that is crucial to your Approach is a good thing, something weak in a key Approach area is a possible improvement priority.

10. If you haven't got any Deployment statements on a specific Approach statement then either your Approach is too aspirational or something you are doing is so obvious to you that you have forgotten it!
11. Note Evidence as you go along and do a check at the end to see you've captured the obvious things. Evidence is something written that you can pick up. More can be added if remembered later.

## The Overview Report

Don't forget:

- The Overview is only part of the Annual Report. You must be prepared and able to produce the evidence for your statements should you be required to do so.
- Unspecific statements are not helpful and will leave you open to criticism.

*"We have increased the number of carer assessments during the past 12 months."*

What has the actual change been - include figures (not only percentages) and possibly how you compare with a similar Authority. Its not a huge addition to the information but it does make a huge difference to the quality and usefulness of the sentence.

- We highly recommend that you get a critical friend to read this first attempt at producing this Report. Selecting the correct wording is crucial and if done effectively will allow you to put deliver good as well as challenging news.