



*Lifting the Burdens Task  
Force report on housing and  
planning, February 2007*

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Government response to recommendations





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Recommendation	Government response
<b>A. Reform of existing key performance indicators</b>	
1. Act immediately to remove those indicators which are identified as being unnecessary. [See schedule 1 below]	We accept this recommendation. More detailed comments on the two individual indicators proposed for immediate deletion are set out in the attached schedule.
2. Amend urgently those indicators identified as being unsatisfactory in that they do not provide clear or useful information on the performance of local services. [See schedule 2 below]	<p>We will consider this recommendation carefully in the context of wanting to reduce radically the overall number of national indicators in the new local government performance framework. Details will be published later this year. More detailed comments on the individual indicators are set out in the attached schedule. Some of the indicators, such as that on preventing homelessness, we would not agree should be deleted, particularly in the light of the Hills report published in February.</p> <p>We have already done a lot of work on reducing data reporting burdens on local authorities and we are continuing to cut down on duplication of collection.</p>
<b>B. Future arrangements for performance management</b>	
3. The Department should, in exercising its lead role in the definition of the National Indicator Set, place a cap of a maximum of 2 output indicators to support the 200 outcome indicators.	Our aim is that wherever possible the national indicators will be outcome measures, with output or process measures used only where absolutely essential and where they are robust proxies or lead indicators.
4. In recognition of the need for performance measurement to be accurate, appropriate and proportionate, the Department should require local authorities to agree a framework for reporting on performance built upon their Local Area Agreement and enhanced only by a limited set of indicators linked to clearly stated national priorities for measurement.	Accept.
5. The Department should act as lead 'broker' with other departments of state and national agencies to maximise re-use of reported data and avoid duplication and additional cost.	Accept.

<b>C. Reform to the planning system</b>	
<p>6. The Planning Inspectorate (as part of the Audit Commission Comprehensive Area Assessment) should consider a more risk-based assessment of past performance to rationalise future performance evaluation in line with the Barker Review recommendations.</p>	<p>Future assessments of local planning services will be rationalised as part of the new performance framework being developed for all local services by the Audit Commission. (The Planning Inspectorate's role is to assess the soundness of spatial plans and to determine appeals and similar casework under planning and environmental legislation, not to assess the performance of local planning authorities.)</p>
<p>7. As indicated in the local government white paper, the Department should remove the existing statutory requirement for independent scrutiny of the Statement of Community Involvement. (See recommendations 15 and 16)</p>	<p>Accept. Covered in the Planning White Paper.</p>
<p>8. The Department should remove the requirement for government office approval to individual elements of the Local Development Scheme to improve speed and reduce burdens on local authorities and government offices.</p>	<p>Accept in relation to Supplementary Planning Documents. Covered in the Planning White Paper.</p>
<p>9. The Planning Inspectorate should be empowered to enter into a service level agreement with an individual planning authority to oversee the timetable for development of a Local Development Scheme.</p>	<p>The Planning Inspectorate has for some time entered into service level agreements in relation to individual development plan documents.</p>

<p>10. The Department should accept the recommendation of the Barker review to remove the options and issues (Regulation 25) stage from the production of development plan documents/supplementary planning documents.</p>	<p>In the Planning White Paper we propose that for every development plan document there would be a period of plan preparation during which the authority would gather the evidence to support different proposals, and appraise the different issues and options in consultation with the public and stakeholders. During this period there would be a statutory requirement to consult and engage with those bodies and individuals the authority consider appropriate and to a degree proportionate to the scale of the matters covered by the development plan document in a form somewhat akin to the current regulation 25. The formal statutory requirement to consult on preferred options (current regulation 26) would be repealed. However, local planning authorities will need to be able to show how they have involved and responded to the community during the plan preparation stage.</p>
<p>11. Sustainability Appraisal should focus on the core strategy itself and the process standardised through the use of a flexible national template based on a standard set of indicators. The appraisal should be evaluated to determine its usefulness in delivering better plan-making.</p>	<p>We currently stress in guidance that the sustainability appraisal of lower tier documents should always draw on work done at higher levels, including by the Regional Spatial Strategy. We will continue to make this message loud and clear. In addition in the Planning White Paper we propose to remove the blanket requirement for sustainability appraisal on every supplementary planning document. We will consider a national template but the rules governing strategic environmental assessment mean that plan making bodies need to consult <i>locally</i> on the criteria to be used in their sustainability appraisals.</p>
<p>12. The Department should act to rationalise the current Local Development Scheme preparation process to enable concurrent examination of the core strategy and the site-specific allocation Development Plan Document where appropriate and feasible.</p>	<p>It is not normally appropriate to submit and examine core strategies and site allocations at the same time. If there is anything unsound about the core strategy it could mean wasted effort on sites. However the Planning White Paper proposes that <i>strategic</i> sites can be included in the core strategy and also that careful consideration should be given to the need for site allocation DPDs, in the interests of ensuring rapid delivery of sustainable development on the ground.</p>

<p>13. The Department should consider the need for the Annual Monitoring Report in its current form. Consistent with other recommendations in this report, the annual monitoring requirement should focus on those key outcomes, identified within the Local Area Agreement to which the planning and development control function is key.</p>	<p>We are currently reviewing Annual Monitoring Reports and working with both the RTPPI and the LGA on what the key planning ‘outcomes’ should be.</p>
<p>14. National guidance should be reviewed and the requirement for reflection in the core strategies simplified in order to add greater clarity and transparency.</p>	<p>Accept. Covered in the Planning White Paper.</p>
<p>15. Roll out the option of Planning Delivery Agreements for larger or complex projects in line with the recommendation from the pilot review.</p>	<p>Accept. Covered in the Planning White Paper and consultation document on Planning Performance Agreements.</p>
<p><b>D. Simplification of community engagement requirements</b></p>	
<p>16. In line with recommendation 7 above, the task force recommends that, in taking forward the likely outcomes of the Lyons Review of Local Government, the Department agree with local authorities a single community engagement strategy, which is subject to local determination and a test of fitness, rather than focus on numerous individual functional strategies (Statement of Community Involvement, etc).</p>	<p>Accept in principle. Covered in the Planning White Paper.</p>
<p>17. Following on from this, the Department should act to remove out-moded prescriptive requirements for communication, such as those statutes which require public notices in newspapers open to retail sale to the general public.</p>	<p>We will consider this as part of the review of the General Development Procedure Order referred to in the Planning White Paper.</p>

Schedule 1. Indicators recommended for deletion

BVPI	Indicator name	Issue raised by LBTF	LBTF recommendation	Government response
219a	Planning: total number of conservation areas in the local authority area	As the character of local authority areas varies greatly, comparison between them is meaningless.	That the Department and DCMS remove immediately.	Accept. We will delete this indicator from 2007/08. The Task Force did not recommend deleting 219b (percentage of conservation areas with up-to-date character appraisals) and we agree this should remain in force since it has been effective in driving up the number of appraisals being undertaken. These appraisals involve the community in deciding what is special about an area and how that special character can best be preserved.
219c	Planning: percentage of conservation areas with published management proposals	Not all conservation areas need active management and, in many local authorities, quality is achieved through alternative approaches such as design or development guidance.	That the Department and DCMS remove immediately.	Accept. We will delete this indicator from 2007/08.

## Schedule 2. Indicators recommended for urgent amendment

BVPI	Indicator name	Issue raised by LBTF	LBTF recommendation	Government response
64 (also CPA H23)	Housing: vacant dwellings returned to occupation or demolished	Insensitive to the different circumstances which lead to vacant private housing. Data is skewed in some local authorities by city centre properties vacant due to speculative investment activity.	Removal as national BVPI. May be more appropriate as local indicator.  Consider separate local indicator of new city centre properties (where appropriate).	We do not agree to removing this indicator as it plays a part in ensuring that local authorities take responsibility for vacant city centre properties.
106	Planning: new homes on previously developed land	Local authority has no control over homes built. Should reflect number of homes on previously developed land granted planning approvals.	That indicator should record planning approvals not completions.	Our strongly held view, supported by local authority practitioners, is that this indicator should continue to be based on completions. Using planning permissions could produce misleading results depending on when the BVPI is calculated as planning permissions can be amended. Completions reflect what is actually built.

BVPI	Indicator name	Issue raised by LBTF	LBTF recommendation	Government response
109a–c	Planning: percentages of major/minor/other planning applications determined within 13/8 weeks	These measures are not without value, but fail to recognise quality either of the process and/or of the final development. Achieving quality can conflict with the time target, particularly given the impact on Planning Delivery Grant.	Retain indicators but consider additional ways of reflecting quality of service. Introduction/roll-out of Planning Delivery Agreements provide opportunity for qualitative measurement (particularly in respect of major applications).	We will consider this recommendation carefully in the context of the new local government performance framework. In the meantime, we will ease the reporting burden on local authorities by providing the BVPI data to the Audit Commission drawing on the quarterly PS2 returns that local authorities make to us.
202	Homelessness: Number of rough sleepers	Meaningless one-off count and resource intensive to collect.	Deletion as national BVPI. May be more appropriate for adoption by some local authorities as a local indicator.	We will consider this recommendation carefully in the context of the new local government performance framework.

BVPI	Indicator name	Issue raised by LBTF	LBTF recommendation	Government response
203	Homelessness: Change in number of families in temporary accommodation	Should count all households, not just families, although this will increase rather than reduce the reporting burden. Not an informative indicator when reported to public. Duplicates target of halving use of temporary accommodation by 2010.	That indicator is amended to include all households.	We will consider this recommendation carefully in the context of the new local government performance framework. Meanwhile we will retain the BVPI as it underpins an existing PSA target. It is also part of the CPA and would be unusable for this purpose if amended.
212	Housing: average time taken to re-let local authority housing	Difficult to interpret because of hard to let properties, especially obsolete sheltered housing.  Time taken is heavily influenced by extent of re-let repairs required so indicator can act as a disincentive to tackle long term voids which require substantial work.	That indicator is amended to exclude sheltered housing.	This is a long-established indicator which is seen as a key performance measure by local government. The current PI does not include sheltered housing.

BVPI	Indicator name	Issue raised by LBTF	LBTF recommendation	Government response
213	Homelessness: housing advice service: preventing homelessness	As defined, this indicator is meaningless, as it divides the cases resolved by 100 of population, taking no account of levels of homelessness presentations. Local authorities with highest levels of homelessness therefore have better chance of meeting target.	Deletion particularly as national BVPI and adoption as local indicator (where appropriate).	We will consider this recommendation carefully in the context of the new local government performance framework.
214	Homelessness: repeat homelessness	Definition can lead to perverse returns for example in northern local authorities compared with London boroughs. In London households are unlikely to have been re-housed within two years of initial presentation so are unlikely to re-present as homeless.	Removal of indicator as a basis for national comparison and replacement by local indicators identifying re-presentations as proportion of cases. Measurement may be more appropriate from date of permanent re-housing rather than initial presentation.	Accept. We will delete from reporting requirements in 2007/08. We already collect this information via P1E returns and will supply the Audit Commission with the data needed for CPA.