



*National Survey of English
Local Authorities 2006*

*Long-term Evaluation of the Beacon Council
Scheme*



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CHAPTER 1

Background and Introduction

- 1.0 The Beacon Scheme was first outlined in the 1998 White Paper *Modern Local Government: In Touch with the People*. The Beacon Scheme is one of the longest standing policy elements within the Government's drive for modernisation in local government. Currently in its eighth year, the Scheme is intended to raise standards by identifying innovative and excellent performing councils and providing opportunities for learning in, and between, local authorities.
- 1.1 Beacon Councils are recognised as demonstrating exceptional performance overall and within specific themes that are relevant to current policy initiatives, chosen by government. The Beacon Scheme plays an important part in stimulating innovation, building internal capacity and bringing about service improvement. A review of the Scheme and of the Advisory Panel during 2005 led to a refreshed approach, building on its established success.
- 1.2 Beacons are selected for an award on an annual basis and the final decision is made by government ministers based on recommendations made by an independent advisory panel. Authorities hold beacon status for a year, during which they receive funding and support to share their knowledge with other local authorities through methods which include a series of learning exchanges, open days, peer support and other learning activities.

Research Objectives

- 1.3 Communities and Local Government (formerly ODPM) and the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) have jointly commissioned Warwick Business School to undertake a three to five year evaluation of the Beacon Scheme. The aims of the research are to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the Scheme for local authorities. Amongst a range of research methods the Warwick research team has conducted a series of national surveys of all English local authorities. This document reports the results of the third of these. The first survey was carried out between December 2000 and January 2001 and the second between March and May 2004. A survey of front-line local authority staff was conducted in March 2005.
- 1.4 The objectives of this third national survey were to gather quantitative data from the experiences of local authority elected representatives and managers on:
 - Levels of engagement amongst local authorities with the Beacon Scheme and Beacons events;
 - The attitudes of local authority elected members, and officers towards the Beacon Scheme and how it could be improved;

- The impact of the Beacon Scheme and Beacon events on authority corporate and service performance;
- Methods employed by local authorities to improve services and stimulate innovation.

Survey Coverage

1.5 The survey questionnaire was divided into a number of component modules:

The Beacon Scheme

- Perceptions of the Beacon Scheme;
- Ways in which the Beacon Scheme has directly contributed to local authorities;
- Overall levels of engagement with the Beacon Scheme through applications or through learning events;
- Potential improvements to the Beacon Scheme;
- Mechanisms used to disseminate good practice;
- Costs and benefits of being a Beacon Council.

Attendance and participation in Beacon events and learning activities

- Preparation for Beacon events;
- Experience of Beacon events;
- Changes implemented as a result of Beacon events;
- Success of implemented changes.

Innovation and improvement

- Use of customer satisfaction surveys;
- Themes in which improvements have been achieved;
- Sources of learning used to inform improvements;
- Factors stimulating innovation and improvement;
- Restrictions and constraints to organisational learning and change.

Local authority performance and practice

- Perception of local authority's performance;
- Influence of local authority measures on perception of performance.

1.6 As with all postal surveys, there were many incidences of respondents not answering certain questions. All analysis is therefore based on those answering unless otherwise stated.

1.7 Full details of supplementary tables and analysis, and of the survey questionnaire can be found in Appendix A and Appendix B respectively, which are available on request from the authors at:
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CHAPTER 2

Executive Summary

- 2.1 Communities and Local Government (formerly ODPM) and the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) have jointly commissioned Warwick Business School to undertake a three-year evaluation of the Beacon Scheme. The aims of the research are to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the Scheme for local authorities. Amongst a range of research methods the Warwick research team has conducted a series of national surveys of all English local authorities. This report details findings from the third national survey, undertaken in March 2006, which sought to evaluate experiences of, and attitudes towards, the Beacon Scheme.

METHODOLOGY AND PROFILE OF RESPONSE

- 2.2 Six self-completion questionnaires were mailed to the Chief Executive's office in 387 English local authorities. A total of 360 officers representing 176 of these authorities participated in the survey and returned at least one questionnaire representing a response rate by authority of 45%. The sample is representative on a number of characteristics of English local authorities overall. 101 responses were from chief executives/heads of policy and 50 from elected members. The remaining 209 questionnaires were completed by heads of service with responsibility for one of the theme areas targeted by Round 5 of the Beacon Scheme: Benefits Administration (72), Crime & Disorder Partnerships (71), Better Local Public Transport (36) and Early Years and Childcare (30).
- 2.3 Extent of involvement with the Beacon Scheme was high. Four-fifths of respondents (80%) described their local authority as being involved with the Beacon Scheme through either learning or through applications (78% and 58% respectively).

THE BEACON SCHEME

- 2.4 Overall perceptions of the Beacon Scheme were very positive. The majority of respondents agreed that it informs best practice (85% net agreement¹) and innovative practice (84% net agreement) as well as encouraging networking with peers (80%). In terms of direct contributions, perceptions were also generally positive, particularly with regards to increasing external recognition of improvements in service delivery (69% net agreement).

¹ Net agreement = total number of respondents agreeing with a statement minus total number disagreeing.

- 2.5 Respondents believed that the Beacon Scheme is best at delivering conceptual and practical outcomes, such as knowledge and processes for improvement, innovation and best practice and helping an organisation to think strategically (net agreement ranged from 49% to 85%). More than two-thirds of respondents agreed that the Beacon Scheme increases confidence in being innovative (69%) and that the Scheme increases the introduction of innovative ideas and practices (68%). Other important areas where the Beacon Scheme was perceived to be making a positive direct contribution is in encouraging a focus on tangible improvements for customers and clients (61% agreed with this statement) and encouraging an increase in joint partnerships (55% agreed with this statement).
- 2.6 Responses to statements relating to the Beacon Scheme and performance measurement and outcomes, such as helping with audits, various assessments and reviews and in measuring outcomes, were less positive (net agreement ranging from 28% to 45%). These findings appear to correlate with the low levels of agreement that the Beacon Scheme relates to other programmes (for which net agreement was 21%). There was little support for the statement that the Beacon Scheme helped with building organisational capacity, even though, arguably, its practices are central to capacity building (net agreement on this was 13%).
- 2.7 In general, respondents from councils that were engaged with the Beacon Scheme were more positive about the direct contributions of the Scheme. Almost nine in ten respondents from councils currently engaged (89%) agreed that the Beacon Scheme is helpful to networking amongst peers compared to 64% of respondents from councils not currently engaged. Respondents from engaged councils were also more likely to feel that the Beacon Scheme encourages innovative ideas and practices; 73% believed that the Beacon Scheme increases confidence in being innovative compared to just 51% of respondents from councils not involved. Respondents from unengaged councils were also less likely to agree that the Beacon Scheme helps their organisation to think strategically about improvement, that it provides a model for improving performance, and that it helps with CPA.
- 2.8 There is some evidence, however, that Beacon status can place excessive demands on resources with about a third of respondents (31%) feeling that being a Beacon took resources away from service delivery. This is further demonstrated by the fact that a quarter of respondents (25%) felt that the human resources costs outweighed the benefits with 18% feeling the same way about the financial costs. 16% of respondents consider that the Scheme distracts from other aspects of modernization.
- 2.9 Of a series of potential improvements to the Scheme provided in the questionnaire the two most popular were increased freedom and flexibilities (71% agreement) and increased financial incentives (65% agreement). In general, there was support for the scope of the Scheme; just a quarter of respondents (24%) supported more tightly defined themes whilst less than a fifth (18%) believed the themes should have a wider focus. This suggests that the remit of current themes is generally appropriate. However, there was majority support (58% of respondents) for a slight modification to the selected themes in order to give them a stronger focus on more tangible outcomes.

- 2.10 Respondents from councils that had been awarded Beacon status in the last two years were asked how they had passed on their good practice to others. Most (94% of those answering) reported using written material, 92% the council website and 91% open days. The same group was asked how successful their use of each mechanism had been. The most successful dissemination mechanisms reported were face to face methods, such as site visits, study tours and open days; over 90% of Beacon status respondents using these methods found them successful. Mechanisms such as videos/CD-Roms or council websites were relatively less successful (61% and 62% finding success with these respectively).

BEACON EVENTS

- 2.11 Nearly two-thirds of respondents (64%) had taken part in Beacon dissemination events or learning activities since 2004. Beacon Open Days were the most popular; 70% of those attending at least one event/activity having participated in an open day. Around a half had seen written articles, features and guides (54%), attended a workshop, seminar or study tour (49%), seen Beacon Council material on the web (47%) or seen IDeA web-based material on Beacons (46%).
- 2.12 The vast majority of those attending a Beacon event did some form of preparation (82%), most commonly accessing information about the Beacon Scheme through websites or information packs (65% of those who prepared and answered the question) or identifying aspects of good practice to learn from other councils (63%).
- 2.13 Beacon events and learning activities have a positive impact on attendees. Of those answering for all 15 measures proposed in the questionnaire, 92% reported learning a great deal or a fair amount in at least one area. Best practice and innovation are at the forefront of the learning experience with eight in ten attendees (79%) saying that they had learnt a great deal or a fair amount about how best practice had been achieved by Beacon Councils, two-thirds (66%) saying that they had learnt how to develop new solutions to problems and 61% saying that they had learnt how to actively seek innovative practices. Beacon events and activities appear to be less successful at a strategic level. Only a third (34%) learnt about the processes of organisational change used by Beacon Councils and 30% said that they had learnt about the role elected members could play in supporting change. Moreover, just 27% said they learnt how to improve corporate performance.
- 2.14 69% of respondents who had attended Beacons dissemination events and learning activities implemented changes to their services or corporate strategy as a result of lessons learnt from such events. Of these, 50% revised their policy or strategy as a result of attending the event. Generally, respondents reported that changes involving processes and procedures in services (e.g. introducing new technology and new working practices) were more successful than strategic changes such as revising policy or strategy or changing organisational structure and those that depend upon complex relationships, such as working with central government and relationships between members and officers.

- 2.15 When implementing changes as a result of ideas from a Beacon event, respondents were more likely to say that they accelerated existing plans than adapted changes from Beacon best practice and least likely to say they had based changes closely on a Beacon. (This is a shift from the 2004 survey.)
- 2.16 Officers implementing change following a Beacon event typically executed more than one change. Two thirds (66%) of those attending a Beacons event subsequently implemented at least one change. Just 8% implemented one change whereas 58% implemented two or more changes. Half of officers instigated six or less changes (51%) although one in eight (57%) reported at least 10 changes (out of 19 suggested).

SELECTED BEACON THEMES

- 2.17 Respondents were asked about specific changes or improvements they had achieved in the four selected theme areas of this survey. In the eyes of strategic respondents (chief executives, heads of policy and elected members), Benefits Administration was considered to be the theme to have experienced the greatest improvement in the last 2 years, followed by Crime and Disorder. This is true for a number of specific improvements proposed in the questionnaire and at an overall level. Very few cited Better Local Public Transport and Early Years and Childcare. Of the 4 themes, the most innovative changes were perceived to have happened in Crime and Disorder, which was also the theme most likely to have received additional resources from external sources in the last two years, these two changes being positively correlated.
- 2.18 The most common area to have seen extensive improvement according to operational respondents (heads of service) was in working towards performance standards (cited by 64% of operational respondents). Other areas where at least 50% of operational respondents stated an improvement to a great or very great extent were in implementing a formulated plan, reviewing progress and formulating strategy. In terms of differences by theme, strategic respondents (chief executives/heads of policy) indicated that Benefits Administration and to a lesser extent Crime and Disorder have seen most improvement while Better Local Public Transport has seen the least.

OTHER SOURCES OF LEARNING AND BEST PRACTICE

- 2.19 Overall the most common sources of learning drawn upon to support changes are internal sources – such as the implementation of a service improvement plan and internal review – and local sources – such as local professional networks and collaborative learning with partners. Conversely the least cited sources of learning are those available at a national level, such as national learning programmes or participation in learning from Beacon councils.
- 2.20 Two-thirds of operational respondents (66%) reported conducting regular customer satisfaction surveys in their theme area. A wide variety of measures are used to assess customer satisfaction including a number of Best Value Performance Indicators.

- 2.21 Other councils are the most commonly used external source of learning or best practice; cited by 52% of respondents answering. Fewer respondents reported drawing on central government departments (11%), other public sector organisations (11%), private consultants (11%) or other private sector organisations (8%).
- 2.22 Critical to the successful transfer of learning is the clarity of good practice in the source organisation and the knowledge within the source organisation of how to share this good practice; over 90% of respondents stated that these factors were important. Reportedly, the most important factors in sharing learning are the ability to build trust and collaboration (cited by 93% of those answering) and exploring failure as well as success (cited by 91% of those answering). Many factors relating to the respondent's own authority were deemed important in the transfer of learning from another organisation, ranging from being able to adapt learning to the local authority in question (cited by 93% of those answering) to evaluating the progress and outcomes of the learning (cited by 90% of those answering) and choosing the right time to learn from another organisation (cited by 89% of those answering).

INNOVATION, LEARNING AND IMPROVEMENT

- 2.23 Managerial leadership (cited by over 70% of those answering), vision and ambition, and local policy priorities were reported to be the three most important factors in stimulating both innovation and improvement in local authorities. In terms of constraints to organisational learning and change, the major barriers were reported to be time and money, in particular workload pressures (cited by 63% of those answering), initiative overload (cited by 58%), constrained finances (cited by 56%) and a lack of capacity in the council (cited by 48%).
- 2.24 When asked to rate their own authority's rate of improvement in overall performance, the majority of respondents felt their own authority had made some improvement. For 30% this was substantial improvement and for 46% this was fair improvement. Perceptions of how others (e.g. citizens, partners, media) would rate their authority were less positive than self ratings although still positive. Most felt others would say there had been slow, steady improvement or a fair amount of improvement.
- 2.25 Given the Beacon Scheme's objective is to improve local authority performance by a structured sharing of best practice between authorities, it is important to gain an idea of what methods councils employ to try and improve performance and how highly they rate each method. One of the core aims of the Beacon Scheme, peer-to-peer learning with other councils, comes last in importance, with only 23% considering it important to a great or very great extent. Seeking innovation from outside the council was also perceived to be important by only 38% of those answering. However strengthening relationships with partners, another 'external' method, was more valued, 65% rating it highly. Improving performance measurement techniques (72%), improving business processes (70%) and improving management processes (69%) are the methods deemed most important.

- 2.26 Respondents from authorities which had Beacon status in the last two years were asked their views on a list of potential costs and benefits of the scheme. Perceived benefits included raising the council's national profile (which 90% of those answering agreed with), boosting staff morale (89%), motivating further improvement (79%). 71% agreed Beacon status had a positive lasting effect. Only 5% thought that their Beacon status had made the authority less responsive to change in the future. These findings suggest most councils will be receptive to the Beacon Scheme in years to come.
- 2.27 To measure perceptions of performance and the extent of organisational capacity to make improvements, respondents were asked to rate their authority on a number of factors. The highest levels of performance capacity reported included: staff manage their own area of work effectively (76% of those answering citing extensive or fairly extensive capacity in this area); team members maintain high standards of work (69%); elected members and managers talk positively about council aims and ambitions (67%). The four statements which fewest respondents rated as performing well in were: links with national agencies as a source of ideas and improvement (cited by 29% of those answering); staff and managers prepare before taking part in learning activities (28%); elected members, managers and staff regularly take part in learning networks with other agencies (26%); managers and HR officers understand how to support complex learning needs (26%).
- 2.28 This report concludes the second of two national surveys of English local authorities carried out as part of the Beacon Scheme impact evaluation. The findings of a longitudinal analysis of both surveys will be published in a separate report, and will draw out further implications for the Scheme. The surveys sit amongst a range of methods being used to gather evidence on the Beacon Scheme. The analysis of this combined evidence base, and hence of the Beacon Scheme overall, will be presented in a final report on the evaluation.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology and Profile of Response

Methodology

- 3.1 The survey methodology was designed to obtain responses from both elected members and officers working in different roles in different authorities. A postal self-completion questionnaire was used that authorities themselves distributed amongst their eligible staff (for details see below).
- 3.2 In the first instance, a pack containing a letter of introduction and six self-completion questionnaires was mailed to the Chief Executive's office in 387 English local authorities (a total of 2322 questionnaires). As was the case in previous Beacon evaluation surveys, there were three types of questionnaire: chief executive; senior elected member; and head of service. One questionnaire was designed for completion by the Chief Executive of the authority (or his/her representative). A second questionnaire was intended for a senior elected member of the authority. Collectively, these responses represent a 'strategic' perspective of the Beacon Scheme. The remaining questionnaires were intended to illustrate an 'operational' perspective of the Beacon Scheme and were intended to be distributed to four heads of service in the following Beacon Round 5 themes:²
- Benefits Administration;
 - Better Local Public Transport;
 - Crime and Disorder Partnerships;
 - Early Years and Childcare.

These services were chosen as part of the evaluation programme design in order to represent a variety of services provided by local authorities and to be used in triangulation with data collected from other sources. The distribution of questionnaires was conducted internally within each authority and not all the services are provided by every council, therefore we are unable to determine the total number of questionnaires distributed.

² It should be noted that some councils do not have departments or managers with responsibilities for each of these themes and in these cases the population base is lower.

- 3.3 There were six versions of the questionnaire for these six types of respondent (see Appendix B). Although broadly the same, there was some variation in questions and question numbering between these six versions. Therefore, throughout this report, where questions differ this has been noted and the versions referred to in footnotes in shorthand, where: V1 = Chief Executive/Head of Policy Questionnaire, V2 = Elected Members Questionnaire, V3 = Benefits Administration Questionnaire, V4 = Better Local Public Transport Questionnaire, V5 = Crime and Disorder Partnerships Questionnaire and V6 = Early Years and Childcare Questionnaire.
- 3.4 The initial mailing was sent out to authorities in the week commencing March 20th 2006. IFF Research made reminder calls to all authorities over the next two months in order to maximise the response rate, including to individuals to whom the questionnaires had been distributed. Telephone calls were accompanied by e-mails and reissues of questionnaires.

Reporting

- 3.5 We have reported many of the findings as 'net agreement'. This score was calculated by subtracting the total number of respondents disagreeing with a statement from the total number agreeing with a statement.
- 3.6 Base sizes have been defined as small if there are less than 50 respondents. These findings need to be interpreted with caution.
- 3.7 Any reference to the significance of the results refers to statistical significance. All of the analysis was conducted using a 5% level of significance (95% confidence level).

Profile of Responses

- 3.8 In total, 176 of the 387 targeted authorities returned at least one questionnaire and this represents a response rate by authority of 45%. Of those councils that responded, 59% returned two or more questionnaires. Response rates in terms of the type of questionnaire (chief executive; senior elected member; head of service³) were as follows: 25% of the population of 387 councils (54% of councils responding) returned only one type of the questionnaire; 14% (32% of councils responding) returned two types of the questionnaire; 6% (14% of councils responding) returned three types of the questionnaire.
- 3.9 In total, 360 responses were received. Responses by type of authority are shown in Table 3.1, which shows that they are representative, in terms of council type, of the population of English local authorities. Warwick has collected data about all English local authority applications for the Beacon Scheme (Hartley and Downe, 2006) and from this it is possible to ascertain the percentage of all English authorities which have made applications and compare this with the percentage of survey respondents who had made applications (see table 3.5).

3 Regardless of how many service questionnaires were returned.

The percentage that have not applied is the same in both cases (26%) and the percentages that have applied, been short-listed and won awards are also similar in both our sample and the population as a whole. This provides further confidence in the representativeness of the survey sample (see also paragraph 3.16).

Table 3.1 Response by type of authority					
	Total number of authorities	Number of Authorities Responding	% of Council Type Responding	No. of Questionnaires Received	% of All Questionnaires received (360)
			(Row %)		(Column %)
Single Tier	116	60	52%	131	36%
Metropolitan Authorities	36	18	50%	45	13%
Unitary Authorities	47	25	53%	52	14%
London Boroughs	33	17	52%	34	9%
Two Tier	272	116	43%	229	64%
District Councils	238	98	41%	194	54%
County Councils	34	18	53%	35	10%
Total	388	176	45%	360	100%

- 3.10 Table 3.1 shows that there was a good response across local authorities overall. However, larger local authorities were likely to return fewer responses in number. More responses were received from respondents in operational positions than from those in strategic roles (see Table 3.2). Fifty-eight per cent of all responses came from respondents in operational roles, with the remaining 42% from those in strategic roles. However, the response rate was better amongst strategic respondents (21% cf. 14% amongst operational officers). The largest single group of respondents were chief executives/heads of policy accounting for more than a quarter (28%) of all responses. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some chief executives were happy to complete their own questionnaire but were loathe to distribute the other five questionnaires due to time/cost pressures. This is supported by the fact that the proportion of questionnaires returned was higher amongst chief executives/heads of policy (26%) than it was amongst all other questionnaire types.

Table 3.2 Response by role		
	No. of Questionnaires Returned	% of All Questionnaires Returned (360)
Strategic roles	151	42%
Chief Executives/Heads of Policy	101	28%
Elected Members	50	14%
Operational roles – Heads of service with responsibility for:	209	58%
Benefits Administration	72	20%
Crime and Disorder Partnerships	71	20%
Better Local Public Transport	36	10%
Early Years and Surestart	30	8%
Total	360	100%

- 3.11 Fewer responses were received from heads of Transport and Early Years compared to Benefits Administration and Crime and Disorder; this difference in response is due to the fact that some councils do not have Transport or Early Years departments or managers.

Level of responsibility for selected (round 5) themes

- 3.12 Respondents were asked to indicate the extent of corporate and managerial responsibility they had for all the four Beacon Scheme Round 5 themes that the survey focused on. Table 3.3 below shows the proportion of chief executives/heads of policy and elected members who answered the question who stated that they have at least some responsibility (either claiming to be 'responsible' for that service or to have 'some direct involvement').

Table 3.3 Percentage of those answering reporting responsibility for selected (Round 5) themes (strategic roles) (Q30)⁴

<i>Base: All Strategic roles answering</i>	Chief Executive/Head of Policy				Elected Member			
	<i>Base</i>	Corporate responsibility	<i>Base</i>	Managerial or portfolio responsibility	<i>Base</i>	Corporate responsibility	<i>Base</i>	Managerial or portfolio responsibility
Crime and Disorder Partnerships	(75)	79%	(47)	49%	(29)	66%	(27)	52%
Benefits Administration	(68)	53%	(46)	15%	(28)	43%	(26)	42%
Better Local Public Transport	(67)	48%	(45)	11%	(26)	38%	(25)	28%
Early Years and Childcare	(66)	46%	(44)	11%	(27)	33%	(24)	*
Any one of the four themes	(78)	81%	(49)	49%	(31)	71%	(29)	66%
None	(78)	19%	(49)	51%	(31)	29%	(29)	34%

Note: Figures in italics are those with base sizes between 25 and 50. Findings with a base size of less than 25 are represented by *

- 3.13 Most chief executives/heads of policy described themselves as having corporate responsibility for at least one of the 4 themes, although almost one in five did not recognise corporate responsibility for any of them. Around half of chief executives/heads of policy claimed managerial responsibility for at least one of the themes. Crime and Disorder Partnerships are the theme for which chief executives/heads of policy who responded to the survey are most likely to have either corporate or managerial responsibility, with the other three themes at lower levels.
- 3.14 Elected members are less likely to claim corporate responsibility than chief executives/heads of policy in all themes, but slightly more likely to claim portfolio responsibility.

Extent of involvement with the Beacon Scheme

- 3.15 More than half of respondents describe their local authority as being involved with the Beacon Scheme through applications (58% – see Table 3.4). More than three-quarters of respondents (78%) report being involved through learning. 80% of respondents are involved in the Scheme through either learning or applications.

⁴ Q30 – Please indicate whether in your job you have corporate responsibility, such as: submitting applications or coordinating activities as a Beacon Council; responsibility in a theme area (such as Head of Service or portfolio holder); or have no involvement.

Table 3.4 Involvement of local authority in Beacon Scheme (Q3)⁵	
	Total
Through Applications	
Base: All answering	(335)
Any involvement	58%
A great deal of involvement	16%
A fair amount of involvement	19%
Involved a little	24%
Not involved	42%
Through Learning	
Base: All answering	(344)
Any involvement	78%
A great deal of involvement	8%
A fair amount of involvement	23%
Involved a little	47%
Not involved	22%
Involved in either learning or applications	80%
Involved in neither learning nor applications	20%
Base: All answering	(351)

- 3.16 The profile of respondents has also been analysed by the actual involvement of their council in applying for a Beacon award, being short-listed, and winning an award during the Beacon Scheme rounds 5, 6 and 7 based on the Warwick database of applications. Overall, two-fifths of respondents (41%) work for councils that have won at least one Beacon award over the last three rounds (see Table 3.5). A further 13% are employed at a council that has been short-listed for at least one award but has failed to win. A further fifth (21%) have applied for a Beacon award (without being awarded or short-listed) whilst a quarter (26%) work for councils which had not applied for any awards during the three rounds. In Table 3.5 the profile of respondents is compared to the profile of all English local authorities across rounds 5,6 and 7.

⁵ Q3 – How would you describe your local authority's use of and involvement with the Beacon Scheme, through making applications and through learning?

3.17

Table 3.5 Involvement and level of success in applying for Beacon awards (Warwick database)		
	Total*	Total
	<i>Base: All respondents (360)</i>	<i>Base: All English Local Authorities (388)</i>
Won a Beacon award	41%	33%
Short-listed for a Beacon award	13%	15%
Applied for a Beacon award	21%	26%
Not applied for any Beacon awards	26%	26%

*Do not add to 100% due to rounding

- 3.18 Elected members were additionally asked to describe the extent of their activities in the last two years in relation to the Beacon Scheme within their own authority. As Table 3.6 shows those elected members who have been engaged to a great or very great extent in activities relating to the Beacon Scheme are in the minority. However substantial minorities have been involved in supporting engagement with the Scheme by arguing in favour of an application (48%); discussion of ideas generated from attending a Beacon event (43%); and working closely with the chief executive on a strategic approach to Beacons (37%).
- 3.19 The activities relating to Beacons which elected members are most likely to have been involved in over the last two years tend to be at a planning and strategic level, such as discussing with officers after a Beacon event to see what ideas can be used (43%) or working with chief executives on Beacons issues to ensure a strategic approach to Beacons (37%). Elected members have less frequently taken part in activities at a more practical level, for example helping officers in their authority make connections between Beacons and other service improvement initiatives (18%) or helping adapt ideas from a Beacon in another council to their own council context (21%).
- 3.20 Whilst almost half (48%) of elected members have argued in favour of their authority applying for a Beacon in Council or in Cabinet, fewer (28%) have acted as a champion within their authority for applying for a Beacon.

Table 3.6 Extent of elected members' activities in relation to the Beacon Scheme (Q5a)⁶

<i>Base – All Elected Members involved in Beacons through learning or applications answering</i>		
	Base	% participating in activities to a great/very great extent
I have argued in favour of my authority applying for a Beacon in Council or in Cabinet.	(29)	48%
I have been involved in discussion with officers from my authority after a Beacon event to see what ideas we can use from the Beacon	(28)	43%
I have worked closely with the chief executive on Beacons issues to ensure the authority takes a strategic approach to Beacons.	(30)	37%
I attended the Beacon award ceremony	(29)	35%
I was involved in deciding whether a service should apply for a Beacon	(29)	34%
I was part of the authority group which was shortlisted and interviewed for a Beacon award	(29)	31%
I have talked with service managers at a Beacon event to learn about how they managed improvement	(28)	29%
I have acted as a champion for my authority applying for a Beacon	(29)	28%
I have talked with elected members at a Beacon event to learn about their role in improvement	(28)	25%
I have been involved in preparing the application for a Beacon	(29)	21%
I have helped to adapt ideas from a Beacon in another council to our own context	(29)	21%
I have been influential in persuading other elected members to get involved in Beacons	(29)	21%
I have helped officers in my authority to make connections between Beacons and other service improvement initiatives.	(28)	18%
I have taken a role in advocating Beacons in national contexts (e.g. through LGA)	(29)	17%

Note: Figures in italics are those with base sizes between 25 and 50.

⁶ Q5a (Elected Member Questionnaire only) – How would you describe the extent of your own activities in the last two years in relation to your authority and the Beacon Scheme?

CHAPTER 4

The Beacon Scheme

- 4.1 This chapter details respondents' perceptions and opinions of the Beacon Scheme. The chapter first reports on the general views of the Beacon Scheme and then goes on to record the extent to which the Beacon Scheme is perceived to have had an impact on councils. This latter section also details views on how involved participating councils have been in the Beacon Scheme and how the Beacon Scheme could be improved. Furthermore, the perceived benefits and costs of winning a Beacon award are reported as well as the mechanisms Beacons councils have used to disseminate good practice.
- 4.2 Firstly, respondents were asked the extent to which they agree or disagree with several statements regarding specific measures that the Beacon Scheme as a policy instrument is designed to enhance. Table 4.1 below outlines the 13 statements and the levels of agreement to each.

Table 4.1 Agreement with statements regarding the Beacon Scheme (Q1)⁷				
Base: All respondents answering	Base	Net agreement	Disagree/ Strongly disagree	Agree/ Strongly Agree
Positive statements		Percentage of those answering		
Provides information on best practice	(356)	+85%	3%	88%
Provides information on innovative practice	(354)	+84%	3%	88%
Encourages networking with peers	(356)	+80%	4%	83%
Provides models for improving performance	(355)	+67%	6%	74%
Adds value	(354)	+58%	7%	65%
Helps the organisation to think strategically about improvement	(356)	+49%	13%	62%
Helps Comprehensive Performance Assessments (CPA)	(353)	+45%	11%	56%
Provides benchmarking data relevant to Best Value reviews	(349)	+37%	14%	51%
Helps with preparation for audit and inspection	(355)	+30%	15%	45%
Provides models for measuring outcomes	(356)	+28%	15%	43%
Relates to other programmes	(353)	+21%	13%	34%
Helps with building organisational capacity	(355)	+13%	23%	36%
Negative statement				
Distracts from other acts of modernisation	(353)	-22%	38%	16%

⁷ Q1 – To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Beacon Scheme in general...

- 4.3 Responses to these statements illustrate areas where the Beacon Scheme was perceived to be of most benefit, and where its influence was less marked. The three areas in which there was the strongest consensus that the Beacon Scheme is of benefit were in providing information on best practice, providing information on innovative practice and encouraging networking with peers. In each case more than eight in ten agreed that the Beacon Scheme helps in each regard.
- 4.4 Furthermore, more than half of all respondents agreed that the Beacon Scheme is a positive influence in each of the following factors:
- Provides models for improving performance;
 - Adds value;
 - Helps the organisation think strategically about improvement;
 - Helps Comprehensive Performance Assessments (CPA);
 - Provides benchmarking data relevant to Best Value reviews.
- 4.5 There was less of a perception that the Beacon Scheme helps build capacity. More than one-third agreed (36%), with only one in five (23%) disagreeing.
- 4.6 Respondents believed that the Beacon Scheme is best at delivering conceptual and practical outcomes, such as knowledge and processes for improvement, innovation and best practice, and helping an organisation to think strategically (net agreement ranged from +49% to +85%). However, the Beacon Scheme was not perceived to help with building organisational capacity. In the case of information for performance measurement and outcomes, such as helping with audits, various assessments and reviews and in measuring outcomes, net agreement was much lower (+28% to +45%). These findings also appear to correlate with the low levels of agreement that the Beacon Scheme relates to other programmes (net: +21%).
- 4.7 For the one negative statement which was tested in this section, more respondents disagreed than agreed; 38% disagreed that the Beacon Scheme distracts respondents from other aspects of modernisation (16% agreed).
- 4.8 Overall perceptions of the Beacon Scheme were generally consistent across all types of strategic and operational respondents. Only in a few cases were there significant variations in agreement (see Appendix Table A1.2 for details).
- Elected member respondents perceived the Beacon Scheme to be a key method in benchmarking and assessing their council's current performance. Seven in ten elected members (70%) agreed that the Beacon Scheme provides benchmarking data to Best Value reviews. Moreover, net agreement amongst elected members was also higher than average in respect to the Beacon Scheme providing models for measuring outcomes (+48% cf. +28%).

- Chief executives/heads of policy were more likely than the average of all respondents to view the Beacon Scheme as beneficial in encouraging networking with peers (94% cf. 83%) and that the Beacon Scheme provides information on innovative practice (93% cf. 88%). However, they were also more likely to disagree that the Beacon Scheme helps them to think strategically about improving their council; around a fifth (21%) disagreed with this statement compared to just 13% overall.
- Those in strategic roles were more inclined to agree that the Beacon Scheme helped in building organisational capacity (45% compared to 29% amongst those in operational roles). This is particularly driven by high levels of agreement amongst elected members (56% of whom agreed compared to 40% of chief executives/heads of policy). Those in strategic roles were also more likely than those in operational roles to agree that the Beacon Scheme helps encourage networking with peers (88% cf. 80%) and that it helps with preparation for audit and inspection (52% cf. 39%).
- Operational managers in the Benefits Administration service were less likely to feel that the Beacon Scheme helped them in terms of preparing for inspections of their service. Forty-one per cent agreed that the Beacon Scheme assists them with CPA compared to 56% on average. Consistent with this, net agreement is lower amongst those in Benefits Administration than it is overall (+14% cf. +30%) for the Beacon Scheme helping with preparation for audit and inspection.

Table A1.1 and A1.2 in Appendix A detail the differences between different types of respondents to the survey.

- 4.9 There were more varied opinions on the value of the Beacon Scheme between respondents working for councils currently engaged in the Beacon Scheme (either through applications, or through learning) and those not currently engaged. Table 4.2 below indicates statements where there were such differences in agreement. Full details of both agreement and disagreement are shown in Appendix Table A1.2

Table 4.2 Agreement with statements regarding the Beacon Scheme by engagement with the Beacon Scheme (Q1)⁸				
Base: All respondents answering	Currently engaged		Not currently engaged	
	<i>Base</i>	Agree/Strongly Agree	<i>Base</i>	Agree/Strongly Agree
Positive statements				
Provides information on best practice	(281)	90%	(75)	83%
Provides information on innovative practice	(279)	90%	(75)	79%
Encourages networking with peers	(281)	89%	(75)	64%
Provides models for improving performance	(280)	77%	(75)	60%
Adds value	(281)	68%	(73)	53%
Helps the organisation to think strategically about improvement	(280)	66%	(75)	49%
Helps Comprehensive Performance Assessments (CPA)	(280)	59%	(73)	41%
Provides benchmarking data relevant to Best Value reviews	(274)	52%	(75)	47%
Helps with preparation for audit and inspection	(280)	46%	(75)	37%
Provides models for measuring outcomes	(281)	42%	(75)	44%
Helps with building organisational capacity	(280)	39%	(75)	25%
Relates to other programmes	(278)	35%	(75)	28%
Negative statement				
Distracts from other aspects of modernisation	(280)	15%	(75)	19%

Note: Figures in bold are significantly different from each other.

- 4.10 Engagement with the Beacon Scheme prompted respondents to report more positively on the benefits of the Scheme in all respects. The greatest discrepancy between the answers of the two groups related to the extent the Beacon Scheme encourages networking amongst peers. Almost nine in ten respondents from councils currently engaged (89%) agreed that the Beacon Scheme is helpful in this regard compared to more than three in five respondents from councils not currently engaged (64%). Respondents from unengaged councils were also less likely to agree that the Beacon Scheme helps their organisation to think strategically about improvement, that it provides a model for improving performance, and that it helps with CPA.

⁸ Q1 – To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Beacon Scheme in general...

Direct contribution of the Beacon Scheme

- 4.11 Respondents were asked in what way (if at all) they felt the Beacon Scheme had made a direct contribution to their council, and the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that the Beacon Scheme offers a number of direct benefits.

Table 4.3 Agreement with statements regarding direct contributions from the Beacon Scheme (Q2)⁹				
Base – All respondents answering	Base	Net agreement	Agree/Strongly Agree	Disagree/Strongly disagree
		Percentage of those answering		
Increased external recognition of improvement in service delivery	(340)	+69%	75%	6%
Increased confidence in being innovative	(339)	+62%	69%	7%
Increased introduction of innovative ideas and practice	(341)	+63%	68%	5%
Increased focus on areas that produce tangible outcomes for customers and communities	(340)	+52%	61%	9%
Increased participation in joint action in partnerships	(341)	+43%	55%	12%
Increased participation in peer review activities	(339)	+42%	52%	10%
Increased participation in joint action between councils	(341)	+36%	51%	15%
Improved performance management	(339)	+32%	49%	17%
Improved performance measurement	(338)	+29%	47%	18%
Improved or sustained achievements in Comprehensive Performance assessment (CPA) outcome	(341)	+27%	41%	14%
Attracted additional sources of funding	(340)	+16%	40%	24%
Increased alignment with shared priorities (between central and local government)	(342)	+14%	34%	19%
Enhanced civic leadership	(340)	+14%	33%	20%
Improved or sustained Best Value review outcome	(342)	+14%	32%	18%
Increased input to development of national policy	(339)	+12%	35%	23%
Improved quality of relationship with central government departments	(340)	+12%	35%	23%
Enhanced ability to influence central government departments	(338)	+2%	32%	30%
Successful participation in organisational capacity building (CB) programme	(337)	-2%	20%	22%
Successful Local Area Agreement (LAA) negotiation	(340)	-14%	14%	28%

- 4.12 The main impacts from participation in the Beacon Scheme appeared to be spread over a range of important features of local authority roles and

⁹ Q2 – To what extent do you agree or disagree that participation in the Beacon Scheme has directly contributed to the following...

capabilities. These include external recognition for service improvement and in promoting innovation. Three-quarters of all respondents answering (75%) agreed that the Beacon Scheme provides external recognition, higher than that of any other measure. In terms of encouraging innovation, more than two-thirds agreed that the Beacon Scheme increases confidence in being innovative (69%) and that the scheme increases the introduction of innovative ideas and practices (68%).

- 4.13 Another key area where the Beacon Scheme appears to be making a positive direct contribution is in encouraging a focus on tangible improvements for customers and clients (61% agree). Related to this, more than two-fifths of respondents agreed that the Beacon Scheme assists in developing other tangible outcomes; improving performance management (49%), improving performance measurement (47%), improving or sustaining achievements in CPA outcomes (41%).
- 4.14 The Beacon Scheme also appears to be having a positive influence in encouraging collaborative steps to improving services. Fifty-five per cent agreed that the Beacon Scheme encourages an increase in joint partnerships whilst half (51%) believed that the scheme encourages better collaboration between councils. Moreover, half (52%) agreed that the Beacon Scheme encourages peer review activities within local government.
- 4.15 Almost as many respondents disagreed (30%) as agreed (32%) that the Beacon Scheme enhances the ability of councils to directly influence central government. Similar proportions also agreed and disagreed as to whether the Beacon Scheme encourages successful participation in organisational capacity building programmes (20% cf. 22%). The only measure where more respondents disagreed than agreed related to successful Local Area Agreement negotiations; 28% disagreed that the Beacon Scheme has a direct benefit on such negotiations compared to just one in seven (14%) who believed that it does.
- 4.16 However, respondents from councils engaged in the Beacon Scheme reported more impact from the Scheme than those from councils who were not engaged. Those from councils engaged a great deal or a fair amount were much more likely to believe that such engagement does indeed have a positive effect on influencing national policy than those from councils engaged a little or not at all. Net agreement in respect to improving relations with central government amongst those from councils engaged a great deal with the Beacon Scheme and from councils engaged a lot (at +29% and +27% respectively) was higher than amongst those from councils involved a little and from councils not engaged at all (at 12% and 0% respectively). Similarly, net agreement that the Beacon Scheme increases input into the development of national policy was much higher amongst those from councils engaged to a great extent or a fair amount (at +25% and +32% respectively) than it was for those from councils with a little involvement or none at all (who were far more sceptical as to the influence of the Beacon Scheme nationally – net agreement was +3% and +4% respectively). Table 4.4 (Table A1.3 in Appendix A) details all findings among those from engaged and non-engaged councils in respect of the perceived contribution of the Beacon Scheme to their council.

- 4.17 Those from councils engaged a great deal with the Beacon Scheme were most likely to agree that the Scheme encourages peer review (71% agreed compared to 52% of all respondents). Similarly, those involved to any extent with the Beacon Scheme were far more likely to agree that the Beacon Scheme has helped increase participation in joint action between councils than those not engaged (55% cf. 36%), with those engaged a great deal more likely again to agree (69%). As is the case with peer reviews, it appears that inter-council cooperation is a feature that the most engaged councils are more likely to be involved in.

Table 4.4 Agreement with statements regarding direct contributions from the Beacon Scheme – by current engagement with the Beacon Scheme

	Net agreement		Agree/Strongly Agree Percentage of those answering		Disagree/Strongly disagree Percentage of those answering	
	Currently Engaged	Not currently Engaged	Currently Engaged	Not currently Engaged	Currently Engaged	Not currently Engaged
Base – All respondents answering	(275 -271)	(67-66)	(275 -271)	(67-66)	(275 -271)	(67-66)
Increased external recognition of improvement in service delivery	+74%	+46%	79%	57%	5%	10%
Increased confidence in being innovative	68%	34%	73%	51%	5%	16%
Increased introduction of innovative ideas and practice	+69%	+40%	72%	52%	4%	12%
Increased focus on areas that produce tangible outcomes for customers and communities	+58%	+25%	66%	39%	8%	13%
Increased participation in joint action in partnerships	+49%	+16%	59%	37%	10%	21%
Increased participation in peer review activities	+45%	+30%	54%	43%	9%	13%
Increased participation in joint action between councils	+42%	+12%	55%	36%	13%	24%
Improved performance management	+36%	+13%	54%	31%	17%	18%
Improved performance measurement	31%	21%	49%	39%	18%	18%
Improved or sustained achievements in Comprehensive Performance assessment (CPA) outcome	+30%	+15%	43%	30%	14%	15%
Attracted additional sources of funding	+15%	+18%	41%	33%	26%	15%
Increased alignment with shared priorities (between central and local government)	+17%	+4%	35%	28%	18%	24%
Enhanced civic leadership	+18%	-3%	35%	25%	18%	28%
Improved or sustained Best Value review outcome	+17%	+1%	35%	21%	17%	19%
Increased input to development of national policy	+16%	-3%	38%	22%	22%	25%
Improved quality of relationship with central government departments	+14%	+4%	37%	27%	23%	22%
Enhanced ability to influence central government departments	+3%	-3%	34%	24%	31%	27%
Successful participation in organisational capacity building (CB) programme	-	+12%	21%	14%	21%	26%
Successful Local Area Agreement (LAA) negotiation	-13%	-18%	14%	12%	27%	30%

Note: The bold pairs of figures indicate significant difference between the 'engaged'/'not engaged' values.

- 4.18 Respondents from engaged councils were also more likely to feel that the Beacon Scheme encourages innovative ideas and practices. Seventy-three per cent of respondents from engaged councils believed that the Beacon Scheme increases confidence in being innovative compared to just 51% of those from councils not involved. Respondents from engaged councils were also more likely than those from non-engaged councils to agree that the Beacon Scheme improves or sustains Best Value review outcomes (35% cf. 21%), contributes towards achievements in CPA outcomes (43% cf. 30%), that the Beacon Scheme focuses on areas that can produce tangible benefits for customers (66% cf. 39%), and that the Beacon Scheme improves performance management (54% cf. 31%).
- 4.19 In respect to influencing central government departments, there were some wide variations in net agreement by role. Chief executives/heads of policy (-9%), and those working in Crime and Disorder (-19%) appeared particularly disillusioned in the ability of the Beacon Scheme to influence central government (see Table A1.4 and A1.5 in Appendix A).
- 4.20 Net agreement amongst elected member respondents was higher than that for all other roles in respect to Beacons increasing alignment with shared priorities (between central and local government) (+30% cf. +14% overall), with the exception of those involved in managing Public Transport (+50%). Net agreement was also higher than the overall average amongst Public Transport managers (+44%) and elected members (+28%) in respect to the Beacon Scheme improving Best Value review outcomes (net agreement overall: +14%).
- 4.21 Net agreement amongst elected member respondents was also higher than the average regarding the ability of Beacon Scheme participation to improve Civic Leadership (+36% cf. +14% overall), performance measurement (+46% cf. +29% overall) and performance management (+44% cf. +36% overall). Elected member respondents were also more likely than average to agree that participation in the Beacon Scheme contributes towards successful Local Area Agreement negotiations (28% cf. 14%). However, net agreement amongst elected member respondents was much lower in respect to the extent to which they believe the Beacon Scheme increases the input of councils into national policies compared to overall levels of net agreement (+2% cf. +12%).
- 4.22 Net agreement amongst elected member respondents and those in Benefits Administration (at +32% and +35% respectively) was also relatively high in terms of the Beacon Scheme contribution in attracting additional sources of funding. Interestingly, this is in stark contrast to the opinion of chief executives/heads of policy respondents, amongst whom net agreement was -6%.
- 4.23 Strategic respondents were more likely to agree than those in operational roles that the Beacon Scheme contributes towards participation in organisational capacity building programmes (30% cf. 12%), driven largely by high levels of agreement amongst elected members (43%).

Costs and benefits of Beacon status

- 4.24 Respondents from authorities which had had Beacon status in the last two years (Round 5 onwards) were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements denoting the costs and possible perceived benefits of Beacon status. The number of respondents who gave a response to Q23 or Q24 is 65 although the largest base size as shown in the report is 62 for most parts of Q23.
- 4.25 Table 4.5 illustrates the proportion of Beacon status respondents who stated they agreed (both strongly agree and agree) and disagreed (both strongly disagree and disagree) with each statement as well as the net agreement (all agree – all disagree). The table is sorted in descending order by net agreement.

Table 4.5 Costs and Benefits of Beacon status (Q21/Q24)¹⁰				
<i>Base: All respondents from Beacon Councils answering</i>	Base	Net agree	Agree/ Strongly Agree	Disagree/ Strongly disagree
Benefits		Percentage of those answering		
Beacon status has raised the council's national profile	(62)	87%	90%	3%
Being a Beacon has boosted staff morale	(62)	87%	89%	2%
We gained knowledge and ideas from other authorities	(62)	76%	79%	3%
Beacon status motivated further service improvement	(62)	73%	79%	6%
Beacon status has had a positive lasting effect	(62)	65%	71%	6%
Being a Beacon has helped relationships with partners	(61)	64%	70%	7%
Beacon services have benefited the whole council	(62)	61%	76%	15%
Being a Beacon enabled a focus on specific aspects of the service	(62)	58%	66%	8%
Being a Beacon has boosted elected members' profile	(62)	56%	61%	5%
Beacon status has improved perceptions of the council locally	(62)	44%	61%	18%
Beacon status gave the authority influence with partners	(62)	40%	55%	15%
Costs		Percentage of those answering		
Being a Beacon took resources away from service delivery	(62)	-8%	31%	39%
It is hard to sustain innovation during the Beacon year	(60)	-15%	28%	43%
The Human resources costs outweighed the benefits	(61)	-18%	25%	43%
The financial costs outweighed the benefits	(61)	-34%	18%	52%
Beacon services have overshadowed other council departments	(62)	-58%	8%	66%
Beacon status made the authority less receptive to further change	(62)	-81%	5%	85%

¹⁰ Q21 (V1&2)/Q24 (V3,4,5&6) – We are interested to know about the costs and benefits of being a Beacon Council. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements.

- 4.26 There was strong net agreement that the benefits of Beacon status had raised councils' national profile, boosted staff morale and facilitated acquisition of knowledge from other councils. Amongst all the benefit statements presented there was more agreement than disagreement (although there is not majority net agreement in all cases).
- 4.27 For the costs of Beacon status, there was overall more disagreement than agreement for all the statements put forward. However this margin was quite small in some cases, particularly with regards to Beacon status taking resources away from service delivery. This result, and the fact that a quarter of those responding (25%) felt that the Human Resources costs outweighed the benefits and that 18% felt the financial costs outweighed the benefits, suggests it might be useful to conduct more research to explore further the demands on resources created by Beacon status.
- 4.28 Although there was net disagreement that it is hard to sustain innovation during the Beacon year, over a quarter (28%) agreed with this statement. Further research might provide some insight into whether this has any link with the resource impact perceptions reported above.
- 4.29 Only 5% of those answering thought that their Beacon status had made the authority less responsive to change in the future and 71% agreed Beacon status had a positive lasting effect. These findings could suggest most Beacons councils would be receptive to the Beacons scheme in years to come.
- 4.30 Unfortunately base sizes are too small to allow comparison by respondent type or role.

Mechanisms used to disseminate good practice by Beacon award holders

- 4.31 Respondents from councils that had been awarded Beacon status in the last two years (Round 5 onwards) were asked a series of questions to ascertain how they had passed on their good practice to others.
- 4.32 The percentage of those answering that used each mechanism are shown in Table 4.6.
- 4.33 The table shows that written materials and guides are the most utilised mechanism amongst recent Beacon council respondents, followed closely by the council website, open days and networking with other local authorities.
- 4.34 The respondents report utilisation of a wide variety of mechanisms. Secondment or shadowing is the least-utilised mechanism for sharing good practice.

Table 4.6 Use of dissemination mechanisms (Q20/Q23)¹¹		
Base: All respondents from Beacon Councils answering	Base	% using mechanism
Written material/article/guides	(49)	94%
Council Website	(51)	92%
Open day	(57)	91%
Network with other local authorities	(54)	89%
Information pack or toolkit	(52)	87%
Site visit or study tour	(50)	86%
One to one tailored visit	(46)	85%
Workshop	(49)	84%
Network with central government	(45)	84%
Seminar	(51)	78%
Peer to peer mentoring	(46)	78%
Video/CD-Rom	(47)	70%
Secondment or shadowing	(40)	40%

Note: Figures in italics are those with base sizes between 25 and 50.

Table 4.7 shows the proportion of respondents from Councils who were Beacon award holders who successfully disseminated their good practice through various mechanisms.

¹¹ Q20 (V1&2)/Q23 (V3,4,5&6) – Please tell us what mechanisms your authority employed to disseminate its good practice in the Beacon award service and how successful you consider these mechanisms to be.

Table 4.7 Success of dissemination mechanism (Q20/Q23)¹²		
Base: All respondents using mechanism answering		
	Base	% of those using mechanism stating it was successful/very successful
Site visit or study tour	(43)	93%
Open day	(52)	92%
Seminar	(40)	88%
Written material/article/guides	(46)	87%
Network with other local authorities	(48)	85%
One to one tailored visit	(39)	85%
Information pack or toolkit	(45)	82%
Workshop	(41)	80%
Peer to peer mentoring	(36)	72%
Network with central government	(38)	66%
Council Website	(47)	62%
Video/CD-Rom	(33)	61%
Secondment or shadowing	(16)	*

Note: Figures in italics are those with base sizes between 25 and 50. Findings with a base size of less than 25 are represented by *.

- 4.35 The most successful mechanisms through which respondents' councils had disseminated their good practice were face-to-face methods such as site visits, study tours and open days; over 90% of those from Beacon status councils who used these methods found them successful. More removed mechanisms such as videos/CD-Roms or council websites were least successful (61% and 62% of respondents finding success with these respectively).
- 4.36 Base sizes are too small to allow comparison by respondent type or role.

¹² Q20 (V1&2)/Q23 (V3,4,5&6) – Please tell us what mechanisms your authority employed to disseminate its good practice in the Beacon award service and how successful you consider these mechanisms to be.

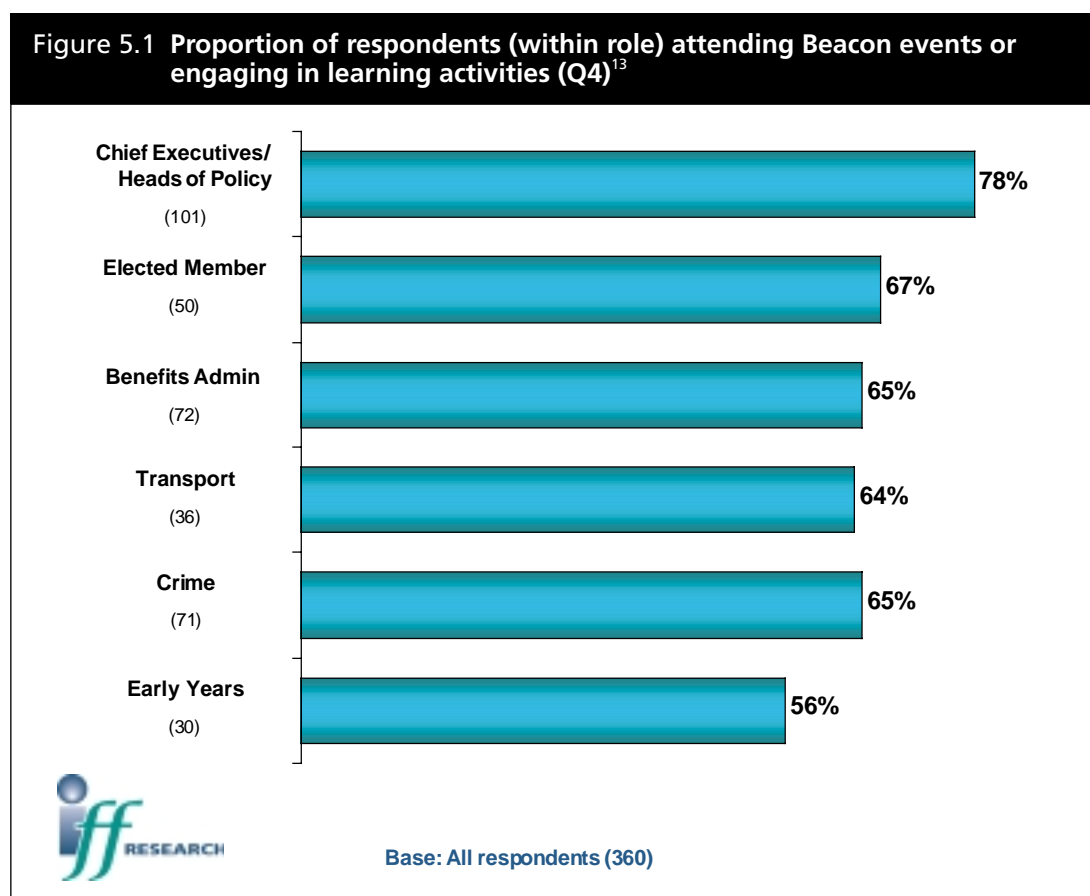
CHAPTER 5

Beacon Events

5.1 This chapter examines the extent to which respondents have attended Beacons events, whether they prepared for such events, the degree to which attendance resulted in subsequent action, and where it did, the degree to which such action was successful.

Attendance at Beacon events/learning activities

5.2 Respondents were asked whether they had taken part in Beacon dissemination events or learning activities since 2004. Nearly two-thirds (64%) said that they had. The proportion attending such events was fairly consistent across the various roles of respondents, although chief executives/heads of policy were the most likely to have taken part (78%) and those in Early Years and Childcare the least likely (56% – still a majority).



¹³ Q4 – We would like to know whether you have taken part in Beacon dissemination events or learning activities since 2004 (Rounds 5, 6 or 7)?

- 5.3 The event/learning activity respondents were most likely to have attended was a Beacon Open Day. Seven in ten respondents (70%) who had participated in at least one event or learning activity had been to a Beacons Open Day (see Table 5.1 below). Around half had also seen written articles, features and guides (54%), attended a workshop, seminar or study tour (49%), seen Beacon authority material on the web (47%), or seen IDeA web-based material on Beacons (46%).
- 5.4 Less popular were toolkits, CD-Roms and videos used by just a quarter (26%). Only a fifth had either attended a National Learning Exchange Conference (20%) or had worked with a Beacon Authority (20%). Strategic respondents are more likely to report using IDeA web-based material and to have worked with a Beacon authority than operational managers.
- 5.5 Elected members were less likely than other respondent types to have attended a Beacon open day (43% cf. 70% overall). (see Table A1.9 in Appendix A), but this was the only difference in their learning activities compared to officers.

Table 5.1 Percentage of respondents attending Beacon events/using Learning activities since 2004 (Q4) ¹⁴			
	Total (% of those involved in at least one event/activity)	Strategic (% within role)	Operational % within role
Base: All respondents attending a Beacon event	(231)	(105)	(126)
Beacon Open Day	70%	69%	71%
Written articles, features and guides	54%	54%	53%
Beacon workshop, seminar or study tour	48%	50%	48%
Beacon authority web-based material	47%	50%	45%
IDeA web-based material on Beacon	46%	53%	40%
Toolkit, CD-Rom or video	26%	28%	24%
National Learning Exchange Conference	20%	25%	16%
Working with Beacon Authority	20%	26%	15%

Note: Figures in bold are significantly different from each other

- 5.6 All respondents who had participated in an external learning event were asked whether they had done so on their own or with someone else, such as a colleague or service user. More often than not respondents reported attending at least one Beacon event with a colleague (70% – see Table 5.2 below). A third (33%) said they had attended an event on their own with smaller proportions participating alongside an(other) elected member of their council (22%), with a partner agency (20%), or with a service user or community group (12%).

¹⁴ Q4 – We would like to know whether you have taken part in Beacon dissemination events or learning activities since 2004 (Rounds 5, 6 or 7)?

Table 5.2 Percentage of those participating in external learning events, attending alone or with someone else (Q5b/Q5)¹⁵

<i>Base: All participating in either the National Learning Exchange Conference, a Beacon Open Day, have worked with a Beacon authority or attended a Beacon workshop/seminar/study tour</i>	Total
Base	(184)
With a colleague	70%
Alone	33%
With an elected member	22%
With a partner agency	20%
With a user or community group	12%

Note: Figures total more than 100% as some respondents will have attended more than one event, one alone and one or more with another person.

- 5.7 All respondents who had attended a learning activity or event were asked if the event covered the area of service for which they were currently responsible. More than eight in ten (81%) said that this was the case for them. Unsurprisingly, given their corporate perspective of council activities, this was lower for strategic respondents (63%) than it was for those in an operational role (93%). However, a small proportion (7%) of operational staff had still attended an event for a service other than their own (see Table 5.3).

Table 5.3 Percentage of those participating in external learning event, attending for own area of service (Q6)¹⁶

	Total	Strategic	Operational	Crime	Benefits	Better Local Public Transport	Early Years
<i>Base: All attending a Beacon event and answering</i>	206	83	123	44	45	21	13
Yes, same service	81%	63%	93%	93%	98%	*	*
No, different service	19%	37%	7%	7%	2%	*	*

Note: Figures in bold are significantly different from each other. Findings with a base size of less than 25 are represented by *.

¹⁵ Q5 (V1,3,4,5,&6)/Q5b (V2) – Please indicate whether you participated in the Beacon dissemination event/s alone, or with someone else from your authority or local region.

¹⁶ Q6 – Was this event/s or learning activity that you attended in the same area of service for which you are currently responsible?

Preparation for a Beacon event

- 5.8 The vast majority of respondents attending a Beacons event did some form of preparation beforehand; 82% claimed they had prepared in at least one way, whilst 18% did no preparation. Of those that had prepared, two-thirds (65%) reported accessing information about the Beacon Scheme through the internet or through information packs whilst a similar proportion (63%) identified aspects of good practice to learn from Beacon councils (see Table 5.4 below).
- 5.9 It was less common for attendees to look at their own council/service prior to the event in order to identify areas from which they might learn. Only a third of those who prepared for a Beacon event, and answered, (34%) reviewed the theme service within their own authority in order to identify areas for improvement and a slightly smaller proportion (30%) collected performance data for comparative purposes. Just a fifth (19%) took the step of identifying personal learning needs prior to the event.

Table 5.4 Percentage of those using specified methods of preparation prior to participating in Beacon dissemination event (Q7)¹⁷			
	Total	Strategic	Operational
Base: All who prepared for a Beacon event and answered	(189)	(80)	(109)
Accessed information about the Beacon Scheme through websites or information packs	65%	76%	56%
Identified aspects of good practice to learn from Beacon councils	63%	56%	69%
Accessed information on Beacon events	52%	55%	50%
Discussed with colleagues issues to be explored at the event	52%	50%	53%
Identified areas for organisational learning	47%	43%	50%
Reviewed the theme service within my authority to identify areas for improvement	34%	34%	35%
Collected performance data for comparison	30%	28%	32%
Identified personal learning needs	19%	16%	21%

Note: Figures in bold are significantly different from each other.

- 5.10 Reported preparatory activities were generally consistent between those in strategic roles and operational managers. However, strategic staff appeared more likely than their operational counterparts to have accessed information about the Beacon Scheme (76% cf. 56%), whereas operational staff were more likely to have identified aspects of good practice to learn from Beacon councils (69% cf. 56%) and areas for organisational learning, although these differences are not significant.

17 Q7 – Prior to participating in a Beacon dissemination event, did you do any of the following?

Experience of Beacon learning

- 5.11 Respondents who participated in Beacon dissemination events or learning activities were asked whether they had learnt a great deal, a fair amount, a little, or hardly anything at all from the most recent event that they had attended.
- 5.12 The responses suggest that Beacon events and learning activities had a positive impact on attendees in certain respects. Of those answering for all 15 measures specified, 92% reported learning a great deal or a fair amount on at least one. Only 5% reported learning either little or hardly anything on all 15 measures (it should be noted that some measures were not relevant to all respondents). Table 5.5 below illustrates the proportion that have learnt at least a fair amount from the 15 issues measured.

Table 5.5 Extent of learning from Beacon events (Q8)¹⁸						
Base: All participating in Beacons events and answering	A fair amount/A great deal (percentages within role)					
	Base	Overall	Base	Strategic	Base	Operational
How best practice has been achieved by Beacon councils	(193)	79%	(77)	83%	(116)	77%
Developing new solutions to problems	(191)	66%	(76)	66%	(121)	67%
Actively seeking innovative practices	(189)	61%	(76)	64%	(113)	59%
How challenges for improvement were identified	(190)	61%	(75)	68%	(115)	56%
Practical details of how to implement specific improvements in service delivery	(191)	57%	(75)	59%	(116)	55%
Partnership working for mutually beneficial outcomes	(190)	56%	(76)	59%	(114)	54%
The level of resource deployed by Beacon councils	(190)	52%	(26)	47%	(114)	54%
Consultation and feedback with staff, customers and stakeholders	(190)	46%	(75)	51%	(115)	43%
How to overcome barriers to change	(189)	45%	(76)	57%	(113)	37%
Leadership of change	(192)	43%	(76)	53%	(116)	36%
Measuring and monitoring performance	(192)	40%	(77)	39%	(115)	41%
Facts and figures about service performance in other authorities	(190)	38%	(175)	37%	(115)	39%
Processes of organisational change used by Beacon councils	(189)	34%	(76)	37%	(113)	33%
The role of elected members in supporting change	(191)	30%	(76)	41%	(115)	23%
How to improve corporate performance	(191)	27%	(76)	37%	(115)	20%

Note: Figures in bold are findings that are significantly different from each other.

¹⁸ Q8 – We are interested to know whether the Beacon event/s that you attended measured up to your expectations. Thinking about the most recent Beacon event that you attended, please indicate the amount that you learnt in the following areas.

- 5.13 The primary success of Beacon Scheme events appeared to be in spreading 'best practice' amongst other councils. Eight in ten attendees (79%) said that they had either learnt a great deal or a fair amount about how Beacon councils achieve best practice from such events.
- 5.14 Innovative solutions and approaches are another facet that the Beacon Scheme appears to encourage; two-thirds (66%) of respondents who reported attending events cited the development of new solutions to problems as a lesson they had drawn from the last event they attended. Identification of problems and areas where innovative solutions could be of benefit is another perceived benefit of Beacon dissemination events and activities; 61% said that they had learnt at least a fair amount on how to actively seek innovative challenges and the same proportion learnt how challenges for improvement could be identified.
- 5.15 It was at a strategic level that respondents felt the Beacon Scheme was weaker in spreading best practice. Only 30% said that they had learnt at least a fair amount about the role elected members could play in supporting change. Moreover, just 27% said they had learnt how to improve corporate performance, and only a third (34%) reported learning how Beacon councils developed organisational change.
- 5.16 Results were generally consistent by role (see table 5.5; A1.10 in Appendix A) and council type, although there were some discrepancies. Beacon events appeared to have been better at helping officer respondents overcome barriers to change at a corporate/strategic level than at an operational level. Those in strategic roles were more likely than operational managers (57% cf. 37%) to say that they have learnt either a great deal or a fair amount from Beacon events on how to overcome barriers to change.
- 5.17 As could perhaps be expected, elected members were by far the most likely to state that they had learnt how elected councillors can support change (63% cf. 30% overall). Benefits Administration managers appeared to have more difficulty in learning how partnership working can produce a mutually beneficial outcome. Fewer than two-fifths learnt from Beacon events in this regard compared to 56% overall. In contrast, around eight in ten (79%) of elected members said that they had learnt at least a fair amount in this respect.
- 5.18 Strategic respondents were more likely than operational managers to state that they had learnt how to overcome barriers to change (57% cf. 37%); this was particularly high amongst elected members – 68%. Similarly, strategic respondents were more likely to say they had learnt how to improve corporate performance (37% cf. 20% amongst operational managers). Chief executives/heads of policy (89%) were more likely to state that they have learnt at least a fair amount about how Beacon councils achieved best practice (89% compared to 79% overall). Only two-thirds (65%) of Benefits Managers said they had learnt a fair amount in this regard.
- 5.19 Results differed according to the degree to which respondents were engaged in the Beacon Scheme in terms of making applications (see table 5.6). Respondents from councils engaged a great deal in applications for Beacon awards were far more likely than those from other councils to say they had learnt how to actively seek innovative practices. More than eight in ten (82%) of

those engaged a great deal report this compared to 61% overall. Those councils engaged in applications also reported learning significantly more than overall respondents in the area of partnership working for mutually beneficial outcomes (82% cf. 56%).

Table 5.6 Extent of learning from Beacon events – by involvement in the Beacon Scheme through making applications (Q8)¹⁹						
<i>Base: All participating in Beacons events and answering</i>	A fair amount/a great deal					
	Involvement with Beacon Scheme through making applications					
	Base	Overall	Not involved	A little	Fair amount	Great deal
How best practice has been achieved by Beacon councils	(193)	79%	76%	72%	80%	92%
Developing new solutions to problems	(191)	66%	62%	62%	70%	82%
Actively seeking innovative practices	(189)	61%	67%	45%	58%	82%
How challenges for improvement were identified	(190)	61%	56%	49%	67%	72%
Practical details of how to implement specific improvements in service delivery	(191)	57%	55%	51%	50%	74%
Partnership working for mutually beneficial outcomes	(190)	56%	50%	32%	67%	82%
The level of resources deployed by Beacon councils	(190)	52%	51%	47%	47%	64%
Consultation and feedback with staff, customers and stakeholders	(190)	46%	46%	40%	52%	49%
How to overcome barriers to change	(189)	45%	42%	32%	47%	62%
Leadership of change	(192)	43%	35%	43%	49%	46%
Measuring and monitoring performance	(192)	40%	42%	34%	41%	44%
Facts and figures about service performance in other authorities	(190)	38%	32%	38%	45%	38%
Processes of organisational change used by Beacon councils	(189)	34%	35%	32%	37%	41%
The role of elected members in supporting change	(191)	30%	28%	15%	35%	49%
How to improve corporate performance	(191)	27%	30%	15%	30%	33%

Note: Figures in bold are findings that are significantly different from the overall total.

¹⁹ Q8 – We are interested to know whether the Beacon event/s that you attended measured up to your expectations. Thinking about the most recent Beacon event that you attended, please indicate the amount that you learnt in the following areas.

Changes implemented as a result of ideas generated from Beacon event

- 5.20 A key measure of the success of Beacon dissemination events is whether councils actually implemented changes to their services or corporate strategy as a result of the lessons learnt from such events. Of the 231 respondents who attended an event, the majority did subsequently implement changes, with only 34% stating that they had not implemented any of the 15 changes tested. Around two-thirds of respondents (66%) who attended an event or participated in learning activities implemented at least one of the 15 changes, or another change not listed in the questionnaire.
- 5.21 Table 5.7 shows the type of changes which have been made and also whether respondents adapted such changes from Beacon best practice or accelerated existing plans or actions for making changes.
- 5.22 The evidence shows that for survey respondents Beacon events have been successful in bringing about and/or accelerating change in a diverse range of ways. However, there was only one change which at least half of all attendees implemented; 50% revised their policy or strategy as a result of attending the event. (It is worth noting that this change has the most general wording and other changes tend to be focused on more specific changes.) The next most commonly implemented changes, instigated by around three in ten respondents, were a change in approach to working with partners (33%), introducing new working practices (31%), conducting a review of service (29%) and introducing/working towards performance standards (28%).
- 5.23 Of the changes we presented to respondents, the ones they were least likely to have implemented following a Beacon event are a review of support function (implemented by just 14%), a change in service procurement (14%) and a change to approach to work with central government (13%) (see table 5.7).
- 5.24 Respondents attending events reported that their Council tended to be in the process of implementing change either before or during the time of the event. No more than 17% of event attendees implemented any change based closely on changes made by a Beacon council whereas the proportion adapting Beacon ideas to their own circumstances ranged from 14%–44% (see table 5.7).

Table 5.7 Changes implemented as a result of ideas generated from Beacon event (Q9a)²⁰

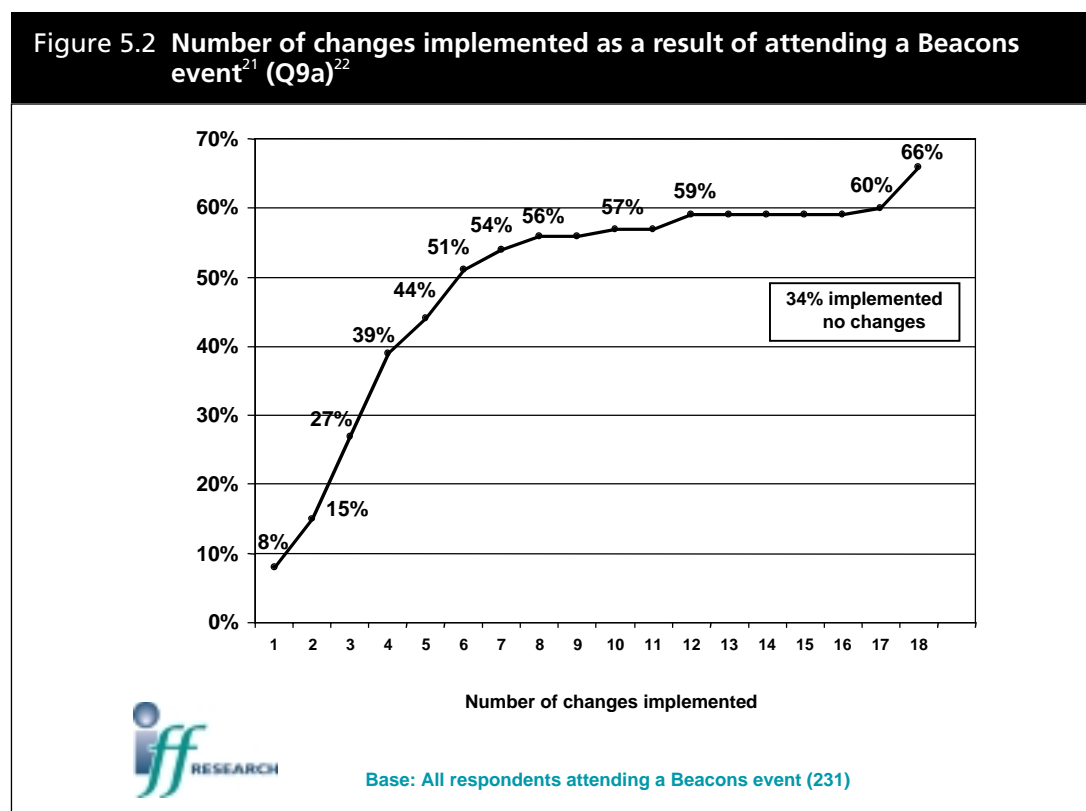
	<i>Base: All respondents who have attended a Beacon event (231)</i>		<i>Base: All respondents who have implemented/accelerated change in area</i>		
	Column %		Row %		
	Implemented/accelerated change		Based closely on Beacon	Adapted from Beacon	Accelerated existing plans
Revised policy/strategy	50%	<i>(116)</i>	6%	39%	55%
Change in approach to working with partners	33%	<i>(76)</i>	12%	32%	57%
Introduce new working practice	31%	<i>(72)</i>	13%	40%	47%
Review of service	29%	<i>(67)</i>	8%	33%	60%
Introduce/work towards performance standards	28%	<i>(65)</i>	3%	14%	83%
More consultation with community groups and users	27%	<i>(63)</i>	3%	29%	68%
Change in customer service	24%	<i>(55)</i>	7%	40%	53%
Integrate service with others	23%	<i>(53)</i>	6%	30%	64%
Change in organisational structure	22%	<i>(51)</i>	8%	35%	57%
Review/improve work processes and work flow	22%	<i>(51)</i>	8%	43%	49%
Change in monitoring and evaluation	20%	<i>(46)</i>	9%	24%	67%
Introduce new technology	18%	<i>(41)</i>	10%	39%	51%
Changes to staff training and development	17%	<i>(40)</i>	8%	28%	65%
Change in approach to member-officer relationship	16%	<i>(37)</i>	5%	27%	68%
Change in approach to working with staff	15%	<i>(35)</i>	17%	37%	46%
Review of support function	14%	<i>(32)</i>	3%	44%	53%
Change in service procurement	14%	<i>(33)</i>	6%	27%	67%
Change in approach to work with central government	13%	<i>(29)</i>	3%	35%	62%

Note: Figures in italics are those with base sizes between 25 and 50.

5.25 Another finding indicates that respondents implementing change following a Beacon event typically executed more than one change. Two thirds (66%) of those attending a Beacons event subsequently implemented at least one change (see

²⁰ Q9a – Did you implement any changes in your service as a result of ideas generated by the Beacon Scheme?

Figure 5.2 below). Just 8% implemented one change whereas 58% implemented two or more changes. Half of respondents instigated six or less changes (51%) although one in eight (57%) reported at least 10 changes (out of 19).



- 5.26 Strategic respondents were more likely than operational managers to report implementing 15 or more changes as a result of ideas generated at a Beacons event (12% cf. 5%), driven mainly by elected members (23% compared to 8% amongst chief executives/heads of policy). Operational managers were more likely to report implementing a small number of changes. Approaching half (48%) said that they had implemented between one and four changes compared to less than a quarter (23%) of strategic managers.
- 5.27 The types of changes implemented varied little according to whether respondents were in an operational or strategic role (see table 5.8). Strategic respondents were more likely to report that they implemented a change in monitoring and evaluation (26% cf. 15%), a change in approach to member-officer relationships (22% cf. 11%), a change in service procurement (20% cf. 10%), and a change in approach when working with central government (21% cf. 6%). Elected members reported relatively higher levels of change in some areas which include: monitoring and evaluation (37%); training and development (33%); member-officer relationship (33%); and approach to working with central government (30%) (see Table A1.11 in Appendix A for a detailed break down of changes implemented by chief executives/heads of policy and elected members).

21 This graph shows indicates the cumulative proportion of respondents who implemented changes.

22 Q9a – Did you implement any changes in your service as a result of ideas generated by the Beacon scheme?

Table 5.8 Changes implemented as a result of ideas generated from Beacon event (Q9a)²³

<i>Base – All respondents who have attended a Beacon event (231)</i>	% within role implementing change as a result of the Beacon Scheme	
	Strategic	Operational
Base	(105)	(126)
Revised policy/strategy	44%	56%
Change in approach to working with partners	35%	31%
Introduce new working practice	30%	32%
Review of service	31%	27%
Introduce/work towards performance standards	27%	29%
More consultation with community groups and users	32%	23%
Change in customer service	27%	21%
Integrate service with others	24%	22%
Change in organisational structure	18%	25%
Review/improve work processes and work flow	20%	24%
Change in monitoring and evaluation	26%	15%
Introduce new technology	17%	18%
Changes to staff training and development	22%	13%
Change in approach to member-officer relationship	22%	11%
Change in approach to working with staff	15%	15%
Review of support function	17%	11%
Change in service procurement	20%	10%
Change in approach to work with central government	21%	6%

Note: Figures in bold are significantly different from each other

Success of implemented changes

5.28 Respondents were also asked to rate the success of the changes they had implemented on the following scale of one to five:

Limited success Moderate success Extensive success

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5

²³ Q9a – Did you implement any changes in your service as a result of ideas generated by the Beacon scheme?

- 5.29 Table 5.9 shows the proportion of respondents who reported a considerable degree of success in implementing the changes examined in the previous section (giving a score of 4 or 5).
- 5.30 The most successful changes involved introducing innovations such as new technology or new working practices. Over half of those implementing new technology (53%), experienced fairly extensive or extensive success.
- 5.31 Those respondents who changed their approach to working with central government or to member-officer relations were least successful; in both these instances, scores were polarised with similar proportions reporting success to those reporting only limited success. Overall, though, change in approach to working with central government more often met with limited success (with a net success of -4%).

Table 5.9 Successful changes implemented following attendance at Beacons event (Q9b)²⁴				
Base: All implementing change		Net successful (4/5-1/2)	% Successful (4/5)	% Unsuccessful (1/2)
Introduce new technology	(40)	35%	53%	18%
Introduce new working practice	(69)	33%	42%	9%
More consultation with community groups and users	(60)	33%	43%	10%
Changes to staff training and development	(37)	32%	46%	14%
Change in monitoring and evaluation	(44)	32%	41%	9%
Review of service	(64)	31%	44%	13%
Change in customer service	(52)	31%	44%	13%
Change in approach to working with partners	(73)	29%	40%	11%
Introduce/work towards performance standards	(63)	29%	40%	11%
Review/improve work processes and work flow	(47)	28%	36%	9%
Change in organisational structure	(50)	26%	46%	20%
Change in approach to working with staff	(34)	26%	41%	15%
Integrate service with others	(49)	18%	35%	16%
Review of support function	(31)	16%	35%	19%
Change in service procurement	(31)	16%	32%	16%
Revised policy/strategy	(108)	15%	27%	12%
Change in approach to member-officer relationship	(35)	6%	37%	31%
Change in approach to work with central government	(27)	-4%	22%	26%

Note: Figures in italics are those with base sizes between 25 and 50.

24 Q9b – To what extent were the changes that you made successful?

- 5.32 Generally lower level changes involving services and staff had better outcomes than those implemented at a higher level such as revising policy or strategy or changing organisational structure. Due to small bases, there are no significant differences in the success rate of implementing changes by respondent job role.

CHAPTER 6

Selected Beacon themes

- 6.1 This chapter investigates improvements or changes that have been made within each of the four selected Round 5 Beacon themes and the extent to which intended changes have been achieved. In order to focus the evaluation, four from the ten Round 5 themes were selected in conjunction with Communities and Local Government and IDeA for in-depth study. These themes are Benefits Administration, Early Years and Childcare, Better Local Public Transport and Crime and Disorder Partnerships. The criteria for selection of the themes included: a range of different types of service; availability of performance measures; extent of cross-cutting and partnership working; established and emergent policy objectives; and the length of time expected to achieve policy outcomes. The four themes from Round 5 allow us to compare different types of policy that cover a broad range of local government activity and have been included in the 2004 and the 2006 national surveys so that we can track changes over time in specific service areas. The Beacon Scheme was in Round 7 at the time of the 2006 survey but we have retained the focus on the four Round 5 themes in order to provide sufficient time to have elapsed to be able to examine whether changes implemented and some degree of assessment as to whether they have been successful. The chapter also explores what sources of learning local authorities have drawn upon in the last two years to support these improvements. Finally, it investigates performance within these four themes from the perspective of the end user, what measures of customer satisfaction are used and what performance results have recently been achieved?

Themes in which main improvements have been achieved

- 6.2 In the 2004 survey, respondents were asked to describe the main changes or improvements they were intending to make in each of the four themes in the next two years. The prompted list of changes and improvements used in the survey reported in this paper are based on a set of choices derived from the verbatim responses in 2004.
- 6.3 Respondents in strategic roles were asked in which of the four themes their authority had achieved their main intended changes or improvements during the last two years (April 2004 to March 2006). Responses to this question are shown in Table 6.1, which is ranked based on those citing at least one theme.²⁵ The number of strategic heads answering is 151.

²⁵ Although respondents were asked to cite *one* theme for each specific change or improvement, large numbers either cited no theme or cited more than one. For those citing no theme we assume the majority felt that there had been no change or improvement seen in the last two years although some respondents are likely to have left this blank as they were unable to specify just one theme which had experienced change or improvement. As there were relatively large numbers of respondents citing more than one theme, we have left these in the data and hence the rows sum to more than 100%.

Table 6.1 Theme achieving main changes or improvements over the last two years (Q10)²⁶					
Base: All strategic roles answering (151)	Benefits Admin	Public Transport	Crime & Disorder	Early Years	No theme cited
Row %					
Reviewed progress	45%	6%	21%	10%	38%
Improved customer service	52%	5%	15%	7%	38%
Integrated service with others	17%	6%	42%	14%	40%
More consultation with public/users	21%	8%	34%	13%	44%
Implemented a formulated plan or strategy	19%	9%	37%	11%	45%
Introduced/worked towards performance standards	35%	5%	25%	9%	48%
Increased speed of process	49%	1%	5%	3%	48%
Introduced new technology	43%	4%	9%	1%	49%
Formulated strategy	17%	13%	32%	11%	49%
Improved accessibility of service	33%	6%	13%	11%	52%
Changed overall structure	23%	2%	16%	15%	54%
Introduced monitoring and evaluation	26%	4%	27%	7%	54%
Introduced/increased quality control/assurance measures	27%	1%	13%	5%	60%

- 6.4 The type of improvement achieved differed by theme, but at an overall level changes had mostly been seen in Benefits Administration (review, customer service and process improvement) and Crime and Disorder (planning, consultation and integration) themes.
- 6.5 As well as asking respondents in strategic roles about specific changes or improvements they had achieved (based on the intended changes cited two years ago) the survey also explored the themes in which respondents had:
- Made the most improvement;
 - Made the most innovative change;
 - Achieved additional resources from external sources.
- 6.6 Reflecting responses given for specific changes or improvements, Benefits Administration was considered the theme with the most improvement, followed by Crime and Disorder. Very few cited Better Local Public Transport or Early

²⁶ Q10 (V1&2) – The Warwick research programme has selected four Round 5 Beacon themes to explore in detail. These are: Benefits Administration, Better Local Public Transport, Crime and Disorder Partnerships and Early Years and Childcare: the Sure Start Agenda. Of the four themes, in which have you achieved the main changes or improvements you intended during the last 2 years (April 2004 to March 2006)?

Years and Childcare. The pattern is similar for the other two measures although it is interesting that the most innovative changes are perceived to have happened in the Crime and Disorder theme, which is also the most common theme to have achieved additional external resources. The two measures are correlated; maybe the additional external resources result from innovation or perhaps Crime and Disorder is more innovative because of additional resources. The results are summarised in Table 6.2 below.

Table 6.2 Themes achieving main changes or improvements over the last two years: strategic perspective (Q10)²⁷					
Base: All strategic roles answering (151)	Benefits Admin	Public Transport	Crime & Disorder	Early Years	No theme cited
Achieved additional resources from external sources	18%	5%	29%	3%	54%
Made the most improvement	29%	1%	18%	3%	56%
Made the most innovative change	17%	3%	21%	8%	60%

- 6.7 Responses are generally consistent between chief executives and elected members and in only one instance do their answers diverge; chief executives/ heads of policy were more likely to say that they had made the most improvement in tackling Crime and Disorder (at 24%) than elected members (at 6%).

Extent to which improvements have been made

- 6.8 Respondents in operational roles were also asked the extent to which they had achieved specific improvements over the last two years. Table 6.3 summarises at an overall level, as well as by theme area, those that had made improvements to a great or very great extent.
- 6.9 The most common area to have seen extensive improvement at an overall level was in working towards performance standards; 64% of those answering having done so. Other areas where at least half stated an improvement to a great or very great extent were in implementing a formulated plan, reviewing progress and formulating strategy.
- 6.10 In terms of differences by theme, a number of improvements were particularly likely to have been reported in Benefits Administration. Benefits Administration respondents were more likely to cite a great improvement in working towards performance standards (83% compared to 64% across all themes), introduction of new technology (67% cf. 42% overall), increased speed of process (65% cf. 41% overall) and introduction/increased quality control or assurance measures (52% cf. 37% overall). By contrast, Better Local Public Transport respondents were much less likely to report great improvements in these areas (as well as a number of others).

²⁷ Q10 (V1&2)- The Warwick research programme has selected four Round 5 Beacon themes to explore in detail. These are: Benefits Administration, Better Local Public Transport, Crime and Disorder Partnerships and Early Years and Childcare: the Sure Start Agenda. Of the four themes, in which have you achieved the main changes or improvements you intended during the last 2 years (April 2004 to March 2006)?

6.11 In many ways these results reflect the perceptions of strategic respondents who reported that Benefits Administration, and to a lesser extent Crime and Disorder, had seen most improvement while Better Local Public Transport has seen the least (see table 6.2). Interestingly there are a number of coherent messages about specific intended improvements across the two types of respondents (see tables 6.3 and 6.1). Very few strategic respondents, for example, reported Crime and Disorder as the theme that has seen main changes or improvements in the introduction of new technology or increasing speed of process (9% and 5% respectively). This is confirmed by heads of the service themselves; these are the only two areas within Crime and Disorder deemed *less* likely to have greatly improved in the last two years compared to other themes. At the other end of the scale, the majority of strategic respondents giving an answer felt that Crime and Disorder was the theme that had seen main changes or improvement in integrating the service with others. This, again, is mirrored by heads of the service of which 54% think there has been a great improvement in this area over the last two years (compared to 38% across all themes).

Table 6.3 Extent to which improvements have been made in the last two years (Q13)²⁸					
Base: All operational roles answering	% within operational role stating improvements have been made to a great/very great extent				
	Overall	Benefits Admin	Public Transport	Crime & Disorder	Early Years
<i>Base (Min/Max)</i>	<i>(185-197)</i>	<i>(63-71)</i>	<i>(27-31)</i>	<i>(65-69)</i>	<i>(22-28)</i>
Introduced/worked towards performance standards	64%	83%	32%	64%	50%
Implemented a formulated plan or strategy	58%	56%	35%	65%	69%
Reviewed progress	54%	61%	28%	62%	*
Formulated strategy	53%	41%	43%	66%	58%
Introduced new technology	42%	67%	20%	30%	31%
Increased speed of process	41%	65%	7%	31%	*
Changed overall structure	45%	42%	31%	51%	54%
Improved customer service	43%	49%	37%	36%	48%
Introduced monitoring and evaluation	43%	45%	31%	51%	32%
Improved accessibility of service	41%	41%	29%	46%	42%
Integrated service with others	38%	30%	17%	54%	41%
Introduced/increased quality control/assurance measures	37%	52%	14%	30%	*
More consultation with public/users	28%	24%	28%	34%	26%

Note: figures in italics have base sizes between 25 and 50. Findings with a base size of less than 25 are represented by * Figures in bold are findings that are significantly different from the rest of the population in the row.

²⁸ Q13 (V3,4,5&6) – Which of the following specific improvements have you sought to make in this service (Benefits Administration/Better Local Public Transport/Crime and Disorder Partnerships/Early Years and Childcare) during the last two years (April 2004 to March 2006) and to what extent have you achieved the main changes or improvements you intended?

- 6.12 Table A1.12 in Appendix A details perceptions of those currently engaged and not currently engaged with the Beacon Scheme on improvements made. The findings suggest no significant differences between these two groups in the percentage stating improvements had been made to a great or very great extent.
- 6.13 Within each Round 5 theme operational heads were asked also about theme-specific improvements they had achieved, again based on responses given in the 2004 survey. Results are shown in the four tables below.

Table 6.4 Extent to which improvements have been made in the last two years – Better Local Public Transport (Q13)²⁹		
<i>Base: All Transport answering</i>	Base	% stating improvements have been made to a great/very great extent
Increased use of public transport	<i>(30)</i>	37%
Improved accessibility of service	<i>(29)</i>	35%
Better service	<i>(30)</i>	33%
Increased safety (road/public transport)	<i>(29)</i>	31%
More services	<i>(29)</i>	28%

Note: figures in italics have base sizes between 25 and 50.

Table 6.5 Extent to which improvements have been made in the last two years – Early Years and Childcare (Q13)³⁰		
<i>Base: All Early Years and Childcare answering</i>	Base	% stating improvements have been made to a great/very great extent
Created children's centre	<i>(26)</i>	81%
Increased quality of services	<i>(27)</i>	63%
Integration of services	<i>(26)</i>	62%
More childcare places/More nursery education	<i>(26)</i>	50%
Reduced crime	<i>(15)</i>	*

Note: figures in italics have base sizes between 25 and 50. Findings with a base size of less than 25 are represented by *.

²⁹ Q13 (V4) – Which of the following specific improvements have you sought to make in this service (Better Local Public Transport) during the last two years (April 2004 to March 2006) and to what extent have you achieved the main changes or improvements you intended?

³⁰ Q13 (V6) – Which of the following specific improvements have you sought to make in this service (Early Years and Childcare) during the last two years (April 2004 to March 2006) and to what extent have you achieved the main changes or improvements you intended?

Table 6.6 Extent to which improvements have been made in the last two years – Benefits Administration (Q13)³¹

Base: All Benefits Administration answering	Base	% stating improvements have been made to a great/very great extent
Improved speed of processing	(71)	62%
Increased take up of benefits	(69)	51%
Improved recovery of overpayments/reduced fraud	(71)	49%
Implemented new structure or practice	(65)	48%
Achieved industry standard	(65)	35%

Table 6.7 Extent to which improvements have been made in the last two years – Crime and Disorder (Q13)³²

Base: All Crime and Disorder answering	Base	% stating improvements have been made to a great/very great extent
Reduced burglary	(62)	73%
Reduced car related crime	(62)	58%
Reduced antisocial behaviour	(60)	40%
Reduced alcohol and drug related crime	(60)	37%
Reduced public fear of crime	(63)	22%

Sources of learning used to inform improvements

- 6.14 Respondents in operational roles were asked to indicate the extent to which they had drawn upon various sources of learning to support the specific improvements to their service, while respondents in strategic roles were asked the extent to which they had drawn on these sources to support improvements to their local authority. Table 6.8 illustrates the proportion of respondents indicating they had used each source to a great or very great extent.

³¹ Q13 (V3) – Which of the following specific improvements have you sought to make in this service (Benefits Administration) during the last two years (April 2004 to March 2006) and to what extent have you achieved the main changes or improvements you intended?

³² Q13 (V5) – Which of the following specific improvements have you sought to make in this service (Crime and Disorder Partnerships) during the last two years (April 2004 to March 2006) and to what extent have you achieved the main changes or improvements you intended?

Table 6.8 Extent of use of sources of learning (Q11/Q14) ³³			
	% within role using sources of learning to a great/very great extent		
	Overall	Strategic	Operational
Base: All	(360)	(151)	(209)
Implementation of Service Improvement Plan	41%	46%	38%
Internal review	34%	40%	29%
Internal performance improvement resources	29%	41%	21%
Internal training and development	28%	36%	21%
Local professional network	27%	21%	31%
Collaborative learning with partners	27%	25%	29%
Participation in council wide programme of improvement	23%	37%	13%
External Audit and Inspection	19%	25%	15%
Peer to peer support between councils	18%	20%	17%
Regional networks	17%	17%	17%
Electronic sources of good practice (e.g. DPM, IDeA, website)	17%	24%	12%
Collaboration with regional government offices	15%	10%	19%
Local service based benchmarking	14%	16%	13%
Collaboration with central government departments	12%	6%	16%
Collaboration with national agencies	11%	11%	11%
Performance support	7%	9%	5%
Participation in learning as a Beacons council	4%	7%	2%
Participation in ODPM capacity building initiative	4%	7%	1%
Participation in local learning programme	4%	3%	5%
Participation in learning from Beacons councils	3%	3%	3%
Participation in national learning programme	2%	3%	1%

Note: Figures in bold are findings that are significantly different from each other

- 6.15 Overall the most common sources of learning drawn upon to support changes were internal sources, such as the implementation of a Service Improvement Plan and internal review. Conversely the least used sources of learning were those available at a national level, such as national learning programmes or participation in learning from Beacons councils.

³³ Q11 (V1&2) – What sources of learning did you draw upon to support the specific improvements in your local authority?/Q14 (V3,4,5&6) – What sources of learning did you draw upon to support the specific improvements to your service (Benefits Administration/Better Local Public Transport/Crime and Disorder Partnerships/Early Years and Childcare)?

- 6.16 Strategic respondents were more likely to use (to a great/very great extent) internal sources of learning, while operational respondents were more likely to use external sources. Almost a third of the latter said they had used a local professional network (31% of those in operational roles cf. 21% of those in strategic roles) and significantly more respondents in operational roles had collaborated with regional government offices (19% cf. 10% of those in strategic roles) or central government departments (16% cf. 6% of those in strategic roles).
- 6.17 Chief executive and heads of policy respondents were more likely than elected members to use (to a great/very great extent) almost all sources of learning (see Table A1.13 in Appendix A). They were significantly more likely to use collaborative learning with partners (30% cf. 16% of elected members) and local professional networks (26% cf. 12% of elected members). Amongst elected member respondents the service improvement plan and internal review were the sources of learning most commonly reported (by 40% and 36% respectively). Elected members were more likely to make use of Communities and Local Government capacity building than others (10% c.f. 4% overall) and less likely to make use of professional networks (12% c.f. 27% overall).
- 6.18 There is also some variation reported in the sources of learning used by each service theme, as illustrated in Table 6.9. Respondents in Benefits Administration were much more likely to have implemented a Service Improvement Plan; over half (54%) having done so. This is consistent with the overall commitment to improvement already seen within this theme. Conversely, Public Transport respondents were less likely to have utilised a number of sources of learning, particularly internal sources such as internal review (14%) and most strikingly external audit and inspection and internal training and development (3% each).

Table 6.9 Extent of use of sources of learning by theme (Q13) ³⁴					
	% using sources of learning to a great/very great extent				
	All Operational	Benefits Admin	Public Transport	Crime & Disorder	Early Years
<i>Base: All</i>	(209)	(72)	(36)	(71)	(30)
Implementation of Service Improvement Plan	38%	54%	17%	30%	43%
Local professional network	31%	26%	28%	38%	30%
Internal review	29%	43%	14%	23%	27%
Collaborative learning with partners	29%	19%	19%	39%	37%
Internal performance improvement resources	21%	31%	14%	17%	13%
Internal training and development	21%	38%	3%	14%	20%
Collaboration with regional government offices	19%	-	11%	35%	33%
Peer to peer support between councils	17%	13%	17%	20%	20%
Regional networks	17%	13%	8%	18%	33%
Collaboration with central government departments	16%	22%	8%	14%	17%
External Audit and Inspection	15%	18%	3%	15%	23%
Participation in council wide programme of improvement	13%	15%	8%	13%	17%
Local service based benchmarking	13%	19%	6%	15%	3%
Electronic sources of good practice (e.g. DCLG, IDeA, website)	12%	14%	6%	18%	-
Collaboration with national agencies	11%	8%	3%	14%	20%
Performance support	5%	8%	3%	4%	3%
Participation in local learning programme	5%	4%	-	8%	3%
Participation in learning from Beacons councils	3%	6%	3%	1%	3%
Participation in learning as a Beacons council	2%	3%	-	1%	3%
Participation in ODPM capacity building initiative	1%	3%	-	-	-
Participation in national learning programme	1%	1%	-	1%	3%

Note: Figure in italics are those with base sizes between 25 and 50. Figures in bold show findings that are significantly different from the rest of the population in the row.

- 6.19 Respondents not currently engaged with the Beacon Scheme were more likely (to a great/very great extent) to report collaboration with central government departments as a source of learning (23% cf. 9% of those currently engaged with the Beacon Scheme) and with national agencies (18% cf. 9% of those currently engaged with the Beacon Scheme), although this group were less likely to use performance support than those engaged with the Scheme (1% cf. 8% of those currently engaged). (See Table A1.14 in Appendix A.)

³⁴ Q13 (V3,4,5&6) – What sources of learning did you draw upon to support the specific improvements to your service (Benefits Administration/Better Local Public Transport/Crime and Disorder Partnerships/Early Years and Childcare)?

Use of customer satisfaction surveys

- 6.20 Two-thirds (66%) of operational respondents reported that regular customer satisfaction surveys were conducted in their theme area. This varies depending on the theme area, as illustrated in Table 6.10.
- 6.21 The majority of those working in Benefits Administration services (78%) reported conducting regular customer satisfaction surveys whilst significantly fewer working in the area of Better Local Public Transport (42%) did so.

Table 6.10 Proportion of Local Authorities conducting regular customer satisfaction surveys in one of four themes (Q11)³⁵		
<i>Base: All operational roles answering</i>	<i>Base</i>	<i>% conducting regular customer satisfaction surveys</i>
Benefits Administration	<i>(71)</i>	79%
Early Years and Childcare	<i>(30)</i>	67%
Crime and Disorder Partnerships	<i>(66)</i>	61%
Better Local Public Transport	<i>(37)</i>	47%
Total	<i>(199)</i>	66%

Note: figures in italics have base sizes between 25 and 50.

- 6.22 There are no significant variations in response according to whether respondents work for a council engaged or not engaged in the Beacon Scheme.

Key measures of customer satisfaction employed

- 6.23 In order to find out the key measures used to assess customer satisfaction operational respondents were asked to give their five most recent performance measures and results, and respondents were given an open ended format in which to do this.
- 6.24 Among those answering the question, it was relatively uncommon for respondents to use only one measure; most were able to give results for more than one type of indicator. However, a number of respondents did leave the question blank and consequently there are relatively small base sizes, so results should be treated with caution (particularly for Early Years and Childcare and Better Local Public Transport themes).

³⁵ Q11 (V3,4,5&6) – Does your authority conduct regular customer satisfaction surveys in this theme (Benefits Administration/Better Local Public Transport/Crime and Disorder Partnerships/Early Years and Childcare)?

- 6.25 It is worth noting that many respondents interpreted 'performance measure' as the *means* by which performance measures were obtained (e.g. customer satisfaction questionnaire) rather than the *measure* itself (e.g. proportion of customers satisfied with X).
- 6.26 Measures and results for each theme were diverse and are summarised below.

EARLY YEARS AND CHILDCARE (BASE: 19)

- 6.27 In response to the question about the key measures of customer satisfaction used in their authority and the most recent performance results for this service (up to five open-ended responses for measures) most respondents stated that they used some form of user satisfaction survey or questionnaire, either for their CIS (Child Information Service) or SSLP (Sure Start Local Programmes), or as part of a wider annual audit. Various monitoring mechanisms and evaluations of these programmes were also mentioned. Specific performance measures related to these programmes included response times, parental satisfaction with the service, programme take up, access to information, helpfulness of staff, availability of childcare and the number of repeat callers.
- 6.28 Other specific mentions included:
- Practitioner training and development evaluation;
 - Take up of Early Education;
 - Children's information outreach;
 - External project monitoring/evaluations e.g. Childcare Support Fund;
 - Review of membership of Sure Start Local Programme;
 - Residents poll;
 - Exit surveys to providers;
 - Ongoing parental satisfaction assessments in children's centres.
- 6.29 The results of these surveys and performance measures ranged from 70% to 90+% ranked as good/satisfied (where available). All results were either from 2005 or 2006 or were obtained on an ongoing basis.

BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION (BASE: 49)

- 6.30 The most common performance measures used were the Best Value Performance Indicators relating to this theme (BVPI 80a-f) or other measures based on these. Particularly popular were the following BVPI 80 measures:
- BVPI 80(i) – Satisfaction with the facilities to get in touch with the benefits office;

- BVPI 80(ii) – Satisfaction with the service in the actual office;
- BVPI 80(iii) – Satisfaction with the telephone service;
- BVPI 80(iv) – Satisfaction with the staff in the benefits office;
- BVPI 80(v) – Satisfaction with the clarity and understanding of the forms, leaflets and letters;
- BVPI 80(vi) – Satisfaction with the amount of time it takes to be told whether a claim is successful.

6.31 Other measures included the following:

- Average number of days to process new claims (BVPI 78a);
- Average number of days to process notifications of changes of circumstance (BVPI 78b);
- Complaint monitoring;
- Level of compliments;
- Average time to answer phone;
- Appeals – types and amounts;
- Landlord Survey;
- Chartermark;
- Exit Interviews.

6.32 Results varied; overall satisfaction measures tending to give better results than more specific measures, both within and between authorities. Most results presented were dated from 2004 or 2005 with some going back to 2003. One in ten respondents could give information on 2006 performance measures.

CRIME AND DISORDER (BASE: 41)

6.33 For Crime and Disorder, surveys were by far the most common means for obtaining performance measures, with various resident/household surveys being conducted on fear of crime, feelings of safety and quality of life. Specific measures cited included:

- The proportion of people who feel safe or fairly safe during the day/after dark;
- Proportion of people who are worried about experiencing various types of crime;

- Proportion of people who feel their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds can live together in harmony;
- Whether respondents believed their neighbourhood had become safer;
- How satisfied people were living in their neighbourhood;
- Satisfaction with partners tackling crime and disorder;
- The proportion of people rating specific crimes as being 'very serious problems' across BVPI categories;
- Level of rubbish/litter in the city/domestic burglary/damage to property/people using or dealing in drugs/violent crime etc.

6.34 Also used were ratings of the ASB (Anti-Social Behaviour) team, focus groups/citizens panels, workshops, audits (drug, crime and disorder, crime and substance misuse) and evaluations after events, e.g. Community Safety Forum.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT (BASE: 20)

6.35 Satisfaction with local public transport information and with local bus services (BVPI 103 and 104) were the most common measures cited.

6.36 Other measures included the following:

- Cost of fares;
- Satisfaction with specific services or routes;
- Cleanliness;
- Passenger numbers;
- Mystery Shopper Surveys – objective overview of quality of public transport.

6.37 Most recent results were from 2004 or 2005 although some were later. Again the outcomes varied widely between authorities although BPVI measures clustered around the 50% mark.

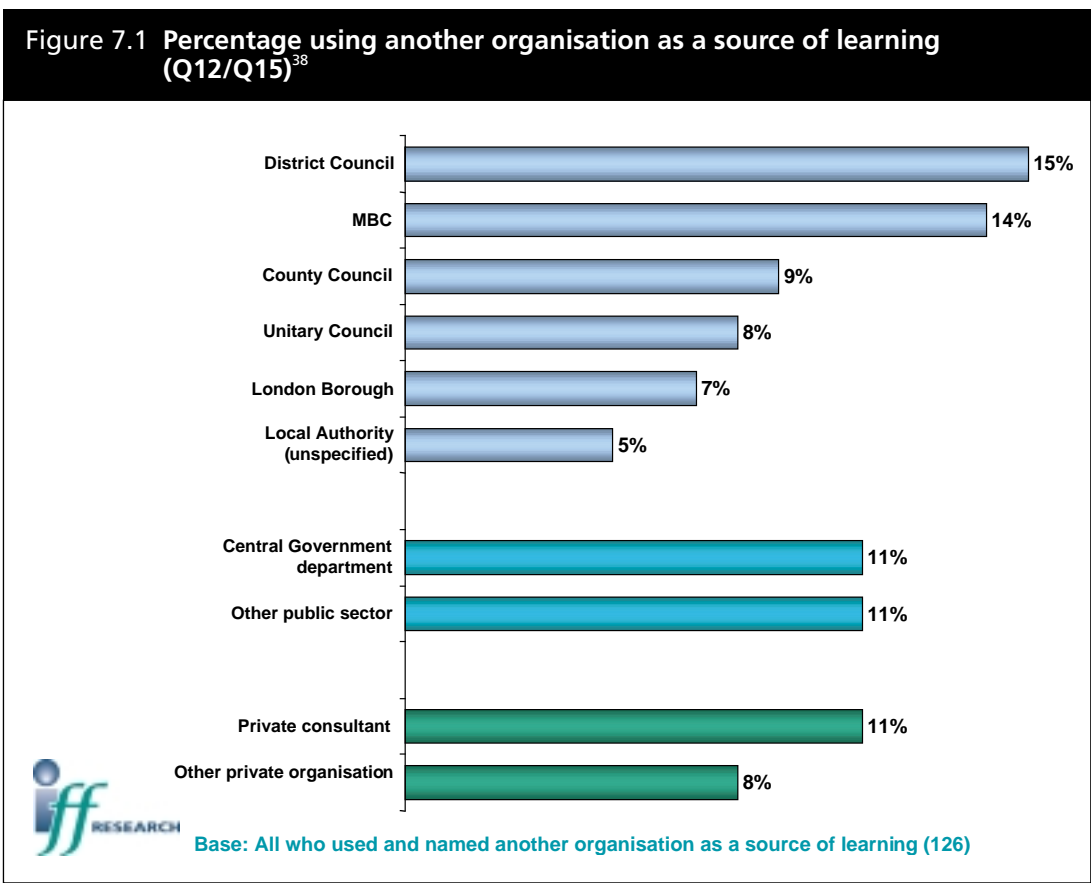
CHAPTER 7

Other sources of learning and best practice

- 7.38 This chapter investigates respondents' experience of bringing in learning or good practice from outside organisations into their own. It investigates the types of organisations that were the sources of learning and factors relating to the external organisation itself, the sharing of learning and how local authorities managed the process.
- 7.39 Of those who had used another organisation as a source of learning or best practice and who gave the name³⁶ (around a third – 126 out of 360), other councils were the most common source used by over half of respondents answering (52%).³⁷ Fewer respondents reported drawing upon Central Government departments such as the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), or other public sector organisations e.g. Transport for London (TFL); both used by 11% of those answering. Similarly, only a small number had used private consultants or private organisations to bring about improvement (11% and 8% of respondents respectively).
- 7.40 There was little variation between strategic and operational roles in the reported sources used, with the exception of the use of other private organisations. Of the 8% who had drawn upon private organisations (excluding private consultancies) all of these were from operational roles.
- 7.41 Those respondents who had used another organisation as a source of learning were asked whether this organisation was a Beacon. 40% of those answering this question said that the other organisation was a Beacon at the time.

³⁶ This figure seems very low and it may be the case that some authorities may have used other organisations but have not recorded it here.

³⁷ It should be noted that some respondents cited more than one organisation as a source of learning.



Importance of specific factors in contributing to success of learning

7.42 Those who had used another organisation as a source of learning were asked to rate the importance of various factors relating to the external organisation. Respondents were given four options: very important; quite important; not very important; and not at all important. Table 7.1 below shows the proportion of respondents by role who thought these factors were either very or quite important.

³⁸ Q12 (1&2)/Q15 (V3,4,5&6) – We would like to ask you about your experience where you have brought learning or good practice from another organisation into your own. This need not be a Beacon. By good practice, we mean a practice that delivers sustained success. The name of the organisation that was the source of learning:...

Table 7.1 Importance of factors in other organisation contributing to learning (Q14/Q17)³⁹

<i>Base: All who have used and named another organisation as a source of learning answering</i>	% within role stating factors are very/quite important					
	<i>Base</i>	<i>Overall</i>	<i>Base</i>	<i>Strategic</i>	<i>Base</i>	<i>Operational</i>
The good practice of the source organisation was clear to me	(124)	97%	(41)	98%	(83)	96%
The source organisation knew how to share good practice	(124)	90%	(40)	90%	(84)	90%
The source organisation helped me to think about differences in my own organisation	(121)	86%	(40)	93%	(81)	83%
The source organisation had previous experience of learning exchange	(119)	64%	(38)	68%	(81)	62%
The source organisation identified our specific learning needs	(116)	59%	(39)	72%	(77)	52%
The source organisation was similar to my own organisation	(120)	53%	(40)	40%	(80)	60%

Note: Figure in italics are those with base sizes between 25 and 50. Figures in bold are findings that are significantly different from each other.

- 7.43 The most important elements of successful transfer of learning were clarity of good practice in the source organisation and knowledge within the source organisation of how to share this good practice; over 90% of respondents stating that these were very or quite important.
- 7.44 Less important (although still important for a majority) was that the source organisation had previous experience of learning exchange (64% of those answering), that the source organisation identified local authorities specific learning needs (59% of those answering) and that the source organisation was similar to those learning from them (53% of those answering).
- 7.45 Respondents in strategic roles who answered this question were more likely to place importance on the source organisation identifying the specific needs of their local authority compared to respondents in operational roles (72% cf. 52%).
- 7.46 Table 7.2 illustrates the perceived importance of various features between local authorities and other organisations when sharing learning, showing the proportion of respondents who rated them very or quite important.

³⁹ Q14 (V1&2)/Q17 (V3,4,5&6) – Thinking first about the organisation that was the source of learning, how important was it that...

Table 7.2 Importance of factors in sharing learning (Q15/Q18)⁴⁰						
<i>Base: All who have used and named another organisation as a source of learning answering</i>	% stating factors are very/quite important					
	<i>Base</i>	Overall	<i>Base</i>	Strategic	<i>Base</i>	Operational
We were able to build trust and collaboration	(121)	93%	(38)	95%	(83)	92%
We could explore failure as well as success	(122)	91%	(39)	97%	(83)	88%
There was respect for diverse perspectives	(121)	83%	(38)	92%	(83)	80%
We were practitioners in the same field	(123)	78%	(38)	66%	(85)	84%
There was emphasis on person to person learning exchange	(120)	63%	(38)	63%	(82)	62%
Learning was mutual	(121)	63%	(38)	58%	(83)	65%

Note: Figure in italics are those with base sizes between 25 and 50. Figures in bold are findings that are significantly different from each other.

- 7.47 The importance of both organisations being practitioners in the same field was cited by a greater percentage of operational than strategic roles (84% cf. 66%), which may be related to the fact that they are heads of specific services with specific needs and requirements from potential sources of learning.
- 7.48 On the other hand the ability to explore success as well as failure was less important to respondents in operational roles, while this was the most important factor among strategic heads (97% cf. 88%). Strategic respondents were also more likely to perceive diverse perspectives to be very or quite important than operational respondents (92% c.f. 80%).
- 7.49 Finally Table 7.3 illustrates the perceived importance of local authorities' preparations and actions within their own organisation when drawing upon other sources for learning and best practice.

⁴⁰ Q15 (V1&2)/Q18 (V3,4,5&6) – Thinking about the sharing of learning that took place, how important was it that...

Table 7.3 Importance of factors in own organisation contributing to learning (Q16/Q19)⁴¹						
Base: All who have used and named another organisation as a source of learning answering	% stating factors are very/quite important					
	Base	Overall	Base	Strategic	Base	Operational
We were able to adapt learning to our organisation	(120)	93%	(39)	92%	(81)	94%
We evaluated the progress and outcomes of learning	(119)	90%	(40)	90%	(79)	90%
We chose the right time to learn from another organisation	(120)	89%	(40)	93%	(80)	88%
There was effective leadership and champions for learning	(119)	88%	(39)	90%	(80)	88%
We were able to implement learning easily	(119)	87%	(39)	87%	(80)	86%
We had good communication across departments	(120)	87%	(40)	93%	(80)	84%
There was good communication between politicians and managers	(118)	77%	(39)	97%	(79)	67%
We prepared well for our learning exchange	(119)	72%	(39)	79%	(80)	69%
We had a framework for learning	(121)	71%	(40)	78%	(81)	68%

Note: Figure in italics are those with base sizes between 25 and 50. Figures in bold are findings that are significantly different from each other.

- 7.50 A number of factors relating to the local authority were deemed important in the transfer of learning, with six factors being considered very or quite important by at least 87% of respondents.
- 7.51 97% of those in strategic roles placed particular emphasis on good communication between politicians and managers in successful learning (relative to 67% in operational roles). Base sizes were too small to separate out chief executives and elected members.

41 Q16 (V1&2)/Q19 (V3,4,5&6) – And thinking about your own organisation, how important was it that...

CHAPTER 8

Innovation, Learning and Improvement

- 8.1 This final chapter looks at perceived influences on organisational innovation, improvement and learning. First, it explores those factors that respondents believe helped innovation and improvement. Secondly it examines factors which are barriers to organisational learning and change. Thirdly it investigates the organisational capacity to make improvements. It then goes on to explore how measures of local authority performance affect perceptions of the local authority for those that work there and perceptions of other parties' estimation of improvement. Finally it investigates methods which respondents believed are important to councils' approach to improving performance.

Stimulating innovation and improvement

- 8.2 To determine what factors had been important in stimulating innovation and improvement in the last two years we asked all respondents to rate the extent of the contribution of potential factors on a scale of one to five, where:

Limited	Moderate	Extensive		
1_____	2_____	3_____	4_____	5_____

- 8.3 Table 8.1 and Table 8.2 show the proportion of respondents who felt that each factor had contributed first to innovation and secondly to improvement, to a great or very great extent.

Table 8.1 Contribution of factors to innovation in the last two years (Q17/Q20)⁴²						
Base: All answering	% stating factor contributes extensively/fairly extensively					
	Base	Overall	Base	Strategic	Base	Operational
Managerial leadership	(325)	70%	(132)	82%	(193)	63%
Vision and ambition	(321)	69%	(131)	76%	(190)	64%
Local policy priorities	(325)	61%	(130)	70%	(195)	55%
Grants and extra funding	(324)	54%	(130)	44%	(194)	60%
Evidence of outcomes	(317)	51%	(126)	60%	(191)	45%
Culture of improvement and learning	(315)	49%	(127)	59%	(188)	43%
Level of investment	(318)	46%	(129)	49%	(189)	44%
Partnership relationships	(320)	46%	(129)	46%	(191)	47%
Consultation with stakeholders	(321)	45%	(129)	53%	(192)	39%
Individual champions of change	(315)	44%	(127)	51%	(188)	40%
Additional resources	(319)	43%	(130)	38%	(189)	46%
Capacity of council	(315)	41%	(124)	58%	(191)	29%
Change management strategy	(317)	41%	(130)	54%	(187)	32%
Political leadership	(323)	40%	(132)	62%	(191)	24%
Performance management systems	(322)	39%	(135)	53%	(187)	30%
Community consultation	(316)	39%	(127)	50%	(189)	32%
Central government policy priorities	(325)	34%	(131)	20%	(194)	43%
Social and economic factors	(319)	34%	(128)	35%	(191)	32%
Audit and inspection	(322)	31%	(131)	41%	(191)	24%
Demographic factors	(317)	29%	(127)	31%	(190)	27%
Demand from sectors of community	(314)	26%	(127)	32%	(187)	22%
Policy of partner agencies	(313)	23%	(126)	22%	(187)	24%

Note: Figures in bold are findings that are significantly different from each other.

⁴² Q17 (V1&2)/Q20 (V3,4,5&6) – To what extent did the following factors contribute to stimulating innovation and improvement in your local authority over the last two years?

Table 8.2 Contribution of factors to improvement in the last two years (Q17/Q20)⁴³						
Base: All answering	% stating factor contributes extensively/fairly extensively					
	Base	Overall	Base	Strategic	Base	Operational
Managerial leadership	(323)	74%	(131)	86%	(192)	66%
Vision and ambition	(320)	69%	(131)	79%	(189)	62%
Local policy priorities	(321)	65%	(129)	74%	(192)	59%
Evidence of outcomes	(316)	59%	(125)	62%	(191)	56%
Grants and extra funding	(319)	54%	(128)	45%	(191)	60%
Performance management systems	(321)	53%	(130)	63%	(191)	46%
Culture of improvement and learning	(312)	52%	(126)	62%	(186)	45%
Level of investment	(314)	50%	(128)	52%	(186)	48%
Partnership relationships	(319)	48%	(129)	44%	(190)	51%
Consultation with stakeholders	(318)	47%	(129)	52%	(189)	43%
Political leadership	(321)	46%	(130)	69%	(191)	30%
Audit and inspection	(321)	46%	(131)	60%	(190)	36%
Individual champions of change	(313)	45%	(127)	54%	(186)	39%
Additional resources	(315)	45%	(129)	40%	(186)	48%
Capacity of council	(312)	44%	(127)	60%	(185)	33%
Community consultation	(316)	44%	(129)	50%	(187)	39%
Central government policy priorities	(321)	42%	(129)	40%	(192)	43%
Change management strategy	(314)	38%	(129)	53%	(185)	28%
Social and economic factors	(317)	33%	(127)	37%	(190)	30%
Demand from sectors of community	(312)	30%	(127)	29%	(185)	30%
Demographic factors	(314)	26%	(127)	31%	(187)	23%
Policy of partner agencies	(311)	22%	(125)	17%	(186)	11%

Note: Figures in bold are findings that are significantly different from each other.

8.4 Table A1.15 and Table A1.17 in Appendix A show the differences by respondent types and Table A1.16 and Table A1.18 in Appendix A show the differences between engaged and non-engaged councils.

⁴³ Q17 (V1&2)/Q20 (V3,4,5&6) – To what extent did the following factors contribute to stimulating innovation and improvement in your local authority over the last two years?

- 8.5 Managerial leadership and vision and ambition have been the most important factors in stimulating **both** innovation and improvement for strategic and operational respondents alike (between 69% and 74% at an overall level). Local policy priorities come next at between 61% and 65% of those answering. There then follows a cluster of factors which were judged by similar proportions of those answering to contribute to innovation and improvement. The factors cited least often are demographic factors, community demands and partner agency policy (at between 22% and 30% of those answering).
- 8.6 Generally those in strategic roles tended to place more emphasis on the contribution of all of these factors to both innovation and improvement than those in operational roles. For political leadership in particular, the percentage of strategic respondents citing it as important is twice the percentage of operational respondents who do so (62% cf. 24% for innovation and 69% cf. 30% for improvement).
- 8.7 For many of the factors where more strategic than operational respondents rated them as contributing to innovation, it is the responses of elected members that underlie this difference. This is the case for (figure in brackets indicates the percentage of elected members answering who state that the factor makes a great/very great contribution to innovation):
- Vision and ambition (91%);
 - Culture of improvement and learning (76%);
 - Evidence of outcomes (73%);
 - Consultation with stakeholders (67%);
 - Performance management systems (65%);
 - Change management strategy (64%);
 - Community consultation (60%);
 - Audit and inspection (56%);
 - Demand from sectors of community (40%).

See table A1.17 in Appendix A for full details.

- 8.8 Similarly, for the contribution of the following factors to improvement, differences in strategic and operational responses can be traced back to elected member responses (figure in brackets indicates the percentage of elected members answering who state that the factor makes a great/very great contribution to improvement):
- Vision and ambition (88%)
 - Culture of improvement and learning (75%)
 - Community consultation (63%).

See table A1.17 in Appendix A for full details.

- 8.9 There are a few exceptions to the trend of strategic respondents placing more importance on these factors. Grants and extra funding are cited by a greater percentage of operational respondents as contributing both to innovation (60% cf. 44% for strategic roles) and improvement (60% cf. 45% for strategic roles).

This is particularly the case with Early Years and Childcare, 82% of whom cited the contribution of grants and extra funding to innovation. A greater proportion of operational respondents than strategic respondents also felt that Central Government policy priorities had contributed to innovation in the last two years (43% cf. 20% for strategic respondents).

- 8.10 Heads of Early Years and Childcare mentioned slightly different factors as contributing to innovation in their service – 61% felt social and economic factors had greatly contributed while 50% thought demographic factors had done so.

Restrictions and constraints on organisational learning and change

- 8.11 As well as factors which stimulate change, respondents were asked to rate the extent to which factors had restricted their capacity to implement change or engage in organisational learning. Table 8.3 shows the proportion of respondents who felt certain factors had been restrictive to a very great or great extent.

- 8.12

Base: All answering	% stating factors constrain learning to a very great/great extent					
	Base	Overall	Base	Strategic	Base	Operational
Workload pressures	(337)	63%	(136)	59%	(201)	65%
Initiative overload	(336)	58%	(135)	69%	(201)	51%
Constrained finances	(335)	56%	(135)	56%	(200)	57%
Lack of capacity of council	(336)	48%	(136)	51%	(200)	45%
Legislation	(335)	29%	(134)	28%	(201)	30%
Working with Central Government departments	(330)	28%	(133)	32%	(197)	26%
Audit and Inspection	(336)	22%	(135)	27%	(201)	19%
Insufficient cross-departmental working	(333)	16%	(131)	15%	(199)	17%
A lack of sufficient organisational developmental skills to achieve cultural changes	(328)	14%	(134)	18%	(194)	11%
Insufficient skills in change management	(333)	13%	(134)	19%	(199)	10%
Political – managerial relationship	(335)	11%	(135)	6%	(200)	14%
Staff morale	(335)	11%	(135)	12%	(200)	11%
Lack of project management methodology	(332)	10%	(134)	11%	(198)	9%
Difficulty in sharing improvement and learning	(332)	8%	(134)	8%	(198)	9%

Note: Figures in bold are findings that are significantly different from each other.

⁴⁴ Q18 (V1&2)/Q21 (V3,4,5&6) – To what extent would you say that the following factors are restrictive or constraining in terms of organisational learning and change in your authority?

- 8.13 Overall the major constraints are perceived to be time and money. For those in strategic roles, particularly chief executives/heads of policy, initiative overload is a strong restricting factor with almost three quarters (71%) of chief executives/heads of policy finding this to a very great or great extent. Initiative overload was less of a problem for operational respondents, although over half (51%) still find this a problem.
- 8.14 Legislation and working with central government were much more of an issue for elected member respondents with over half finding these constraining (56% each), although workload pressure was less constraining for this group (43% citing this as a constraint) (See Table A1.19 in Appendix A).
- 8.15 Chief executives/heads of policy were more likely than average to cite a lack of capacity at their council or a skills shortage in change management as constraints (cited by 60% and 20% of this group respectively).
- 8.16 Political-managerial relationships are reportedly more constraining for those in operational than strategic roles, particularly for those in Early Years and Childcare (28% of whom cite this factor).
- 8.17 Few respondents offered other constraints to learning other than those they were prompted with, although 4 out of 15 completing this open-ended option cited legislation or Central Government policy causing problems and 2 out of 15 cited IT problems as constraints.
- 8.18 There is only one measure on which opinions divide according to the extent of respondents' engagement with the Beacon Scheme; two-thirds of respondents (67%) at unengaged councils cited constrained finances compared to just over half (54%) of respondents at engaged councils. (See table A1.20 in Appendix A.)

Approach to learning and organisational capacity to make improvements

- 8.19 To measure perceptions of performance and the extent of organisational capacity to make improvements, respondents were asked to rate their authority on a number of factors on a scale of one to five, where:

Limited capacity Moderate capacity Extensive capacity
 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5

- 8.20 Table 8.4 shows that the proportion of respondents that feel they are doing particularly well in these areas (giving a rating of 4 or 5) is greater than one-half for all cases. The highest levels of performance capacity reported included: staff manage their own area of work effectively (cited by 76% of respondents); team members maintain high standards of work (69% of respondents); elected members and managers talk positively about our aims and ambitions (67% of respondents). Full details of responses to the complete list of capacity dimensions are shown in Appendix A1.21 by job role and in A1.22 by level of engagement in the Beacon Scheme.

Table 8.4 Extent of councils performance capacity – Strategic/Operational (Q19/Q22)⁴⁵

Base: All answering	% stating an extensive or fairly extensive capacity					
	Base	Overall	Base	Strategic	Base	Operational
On a day to day basis, staff manage their own area of work effectively	(344)	76%	(141)	77%	(203)	76%
We can rely on team members for maintaining high standards of work	(344)	69%	(141)	70%	(203)	68%
Elected members and managers talk positively about our aims and ambitions	(347)	67%	(143)	74%	(204)	61%
Staff feel proud of council achievements and good practice	(347)	64%	(143)	67%	(204)	61%
The council listens to its users, customers and stakeholders	(345)	64%	(142)	72%	(203)	59%
Elected members, managers and staff are able to work collaboratively	(344)	63%	(141)	77%	(203)	54%
We encourage bringing in new ideas from outside the organisation	(346)	62%	(142)	63%	(204)	61%
The council builds on past success	(343)	62%	(140)	72%	(203)	55%
In this council, we are keen to be innovators, as well as making improvement	(347)	61%	(143)	68%	(204)	56%
Managers and staff use performance data in their everyday work	(346)	60%	(142)	58%	(204)	61%
Elected members, managers and staff genuinely value learning	(346)	57%	(143)	64%	(203)	52%
It's easy to try out new ideas in my service	(343)	56%	(140)	54%	(203)	57%
Managers and staff are keen to learn new ways of doing things	(347)	55%	(143)	62%	(204)	50%
Staff can easily access the information they need to do their job effectively	(344)	55%	(140)	53%	(204)	56%
We are good at delivering better services without needing more resources	(344)	55%	(141)	63%	(203)	49%
Managers don't just talk about improvement, they do it	(347)	54%	(143)	58%	(204)	51%
Staff are involved in making important decisions and plans	(344)	54%	(141)	53%	(203)	55%

Note: Figures in bold are findings that are significantly different from each other.

8.21 There are some differences between the responses of those in strategic and operational roles; in general, those in strategic roles giving higher ratings of performance capacity than operational respondents.

⁴⁵ Q19 (V1&2)/Q22 (V3,4,5&6) – We are interested to know about your authority's approach to learning and the extent of organisational capacity to make improvement. Please indicate your perception of the extent of your authority's performance in the following areas...

Table 8.5 Extent of councils performance capacity – Current Beacon involvement (Q19/Q22)⁴⁶

<i>Base: All answering</i>	% stating an extensive capacity					
	<i>Base</i>	<i>Overall</i>	<i>Base</i>	Beacon involvement	<i>Base</i>	No involvement
On a day to day basis, staff manage their own area of work effectively	(344)	76%	(275)	76%	(69)	78%
We can rely on team members for maintaining high standards of work	(344)	69%	(275)	69%	(69)	71%
Elected members and managers talk positively about our aims and ambitions	(347)	67%	(277)	67%	(70)	64%
Staff feel proud of council achievements and good practice	(347)	64%	(277)	65%	(70)	59%
The council listens to its users, customers and stakeholders	(345)	64%	(275)	65%	(70)	61%
Elected members, managers and staff are able to work collaboratively	(344)	63%	(274)	67%	(70)	50%
We encourage bringing in new ideas from outside the organisation	(346)	62%	(276)	62%	(70)	63%
The council builds on past success	(343)	62%	(274)	64%	(69)	55%
In this council, we are keen to be innovators, as well as making improvement	(347)	61%	(277)	62%	(70)	56%
Managers and staff use performance data in their everyday work	(346)	60%	(276)	60%	(70)	59%
Elected members, managers and staff genuinely value learning	(346)	57%	(276)	59%	(70)	50%
It's easy to try out new ideas in my service	(343)	56%	(273)	56%	(70)	56%
Managers and staff are keen to learn new ways of doing things	(347)	55%	(277)	57%	(70)	47%
Staff can easily access the information they need to do their job effectively	(344)	55%	(274)	54%	(70)	57%
We are good at delivering better services without needing more resources	(344)	55%	(275)	53%	(69)	62%
Managers don't just talk about improvement, they do it	(347)	54%	(277)	55%	(70)	53%
Staff are involved in making important decisions and plans	(344)	54%	(275)	53%	(69)	59%

Note: Figures in bold are findings that are significantly different from each other.

8.22 Looking at perceptions of those involved in Beacons currently, either through making applications or through learning, in comparison to those who have not had any involvement with Beacons, there is little difference, with the exception of ‘Elected Members, managers and staff being able to work collaboratively’

⁴⁶ Q19 (V1&2)/Q22 (V3,4,5&6) – We are interested to know about your authority's approach to learning and the extent of organisational capacity to make improvement. Please indicate your perception of the extent of your authority's performance in the following areas...

where those with Beacons involvement were more likely to perceive capacity and good performance (67% cf. 50%). The results are shown in Table 8.5 and full details in Appendix A1.22.

- 8.23 The areas where the smallest percentage of respondents said their council was performing well in terms of organisational capacity and learning were as follows:
- Links with national agencies are a source of ideas and improvement (29% of respondents);
 - Staff and managers prepare before taking part in learning activities (28% of respondents);
 - Elected members, managers and staff regularly take part in learning networks with other agencies (26% of respondents) (although more respondents in strategic roles felt their council did this (35% compared to 21% for those in operational roles).
 - Managers and HR officers understand how to support complex learning needs (26% of respondents). Again, more respondents in strategic roles felt their council did this (38% compared to 18% for operational respondents).
- 8.24 For a full breakdown of all the statements relating to learning approach and organisational capacity see Table A1.21 and Table A1.22 in Appendix A.

Impact of measures of performance on perceptions of local authorities

- 8.25 The extent to which measures of local authority performance contribute to respondents' opinions of their own authority is useful to understand the place of the Beacon scheme amongst these other measures. This question was asked of respondents using again a five-point scale, where 1 denotes 'a very little extent' and 5 'a very great extent'.

Table 8.6 Extent to which measures of performance contribute to respondents' perception of own authority (Q22/Q25)⁴⁷

<i>Base: All answering</i>		
	<i>Base</i>	<i>% stating great/very great extent</i>
Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA)	(305)	75%
Reputation in local area/region	(308)	69%
National performance indicators	(309)	66%
Local performance indicators	(309)	66%
External audit and review of service sector (e.g. OFSTED)	(301)	59%
National reputation	(307)	55%
Peer review	(298)	43%
Best value review of specific service	(306)	42%
Benchmarking with local network	(303)	41%
Quality awards (e.g. Chartermark)	(303)	36%
Benchmarking with national network	(301)	35%
Beacon status	(289)	30%

- 8.26 Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) has the most impact on respondents' perceptions of their own authority, three quarters stating it contributes to their perception to a great or very great extent.
- 8.27 Beacon status appears much less influential; only a third of respondents (30%) rating it as impacting on their perceptions to any great extent. Strategic respondents are more likely to rate Beacon status highly (36% cf. 25% of operational respondents), as are those currently involved in the Beacon Scheme (33% cf. 18% of those at unengaged councils). Respondents at unengaged councils are also less likely to believe that external audit and review of service sectors contribute towards the view of their authority (47% do so compared to 62% amongst those working for engaged councils). (See Table A1.24 in Appendix A.)
- 8.28 Other than this, perceptions of each performance measure were pretty consistent by respondent type with the exception of peer review which half of strategic respondents (50%) rated highly compared to 36% of operational respondents.
- 8.29 There are, however, some differences of opinion by job role. Elected members are more likely than average to rate highly Beacon status (44% cf. 30% overall) and benchmarking with local networks (56% cf. 41% overall and only 32% amongst chief executives/heads of policy). (See Table A1.23 in Appendix A.)

⁴⁷ Q22 (V1&2)/Q25 (V3,4,5&6) – How much do measures of local authority performance contribute to your view of your own local authority?

- 8.30 Chief executives/heads of policy are less likely to place value on the local reputation (60% cf. 69% overall) or the national reputation (45% cf. 55%) of their council. They do, however, place more emphasis on external audits and reviews of service sectors (69% cf. 59% overall).
- 8.31 Those currently involved in the Beacon Scheme (either through applications or learning) are more likely to view 'external audit and review of service sector' as contributing to their perception of their authority than those not involved in the Beacon Scheme (62% cf. 47%). A greater percentage of the involved than the not involved felt 'Beacon status' contributed to their view of their authority to a great or very great extent (33% cf. 18%).

Rate of improvement

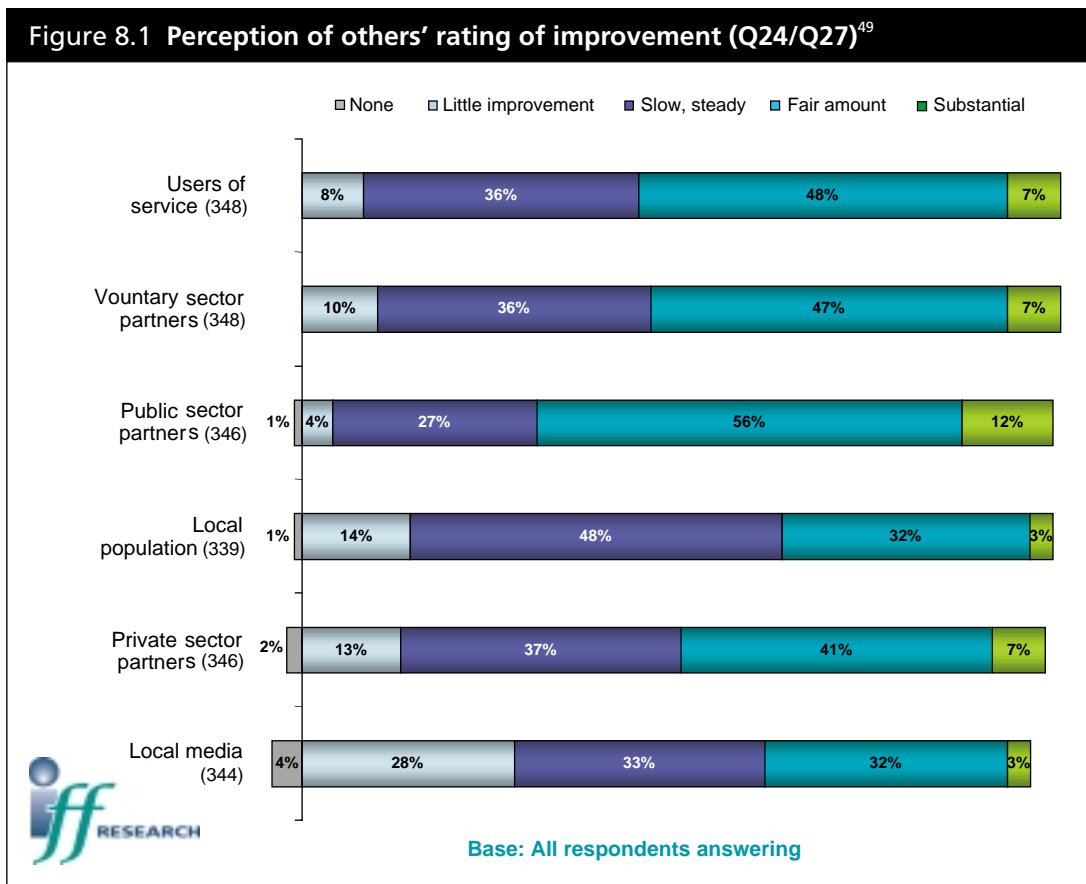
- 8.32 Respondents were asked to rate their own authority's rate of improvement in performance overall, using a five-point scale where 1 denotes 'substantial improvement', 2 denotes 'a fair amount', 3 denotes 'slow, steady improvement', 4 denotes 'little improvement' and 5 denotes 'no improvement'.
- 8.33 In terms of improvement in overall performance the majority of respondents felt their own authority had made some improvement. For 30% this was a substantial improvement and for 46% this was a fair improvement. Table 8.7 shows how this differs by type of respondent.

Table 8.7 Self rating of improvement in performance overall (Q23/Q26) ⁴⁸					
	Overall	All Strategic	Chief Execs/ Heads of Policy	Elected Members	All Operational
Base: All answering	(312)	(146)	(100)	(46)	(166)
Substantial improvement	30%	39%	32%	54%	23%
Fair amount	46%	43%	49%	30%	48%
Slow, steady improvement	21%	16%	18%	13%	24%
Little improvement	3%	1%	1%	2%	4%
None	—	1%	—	—	1%

- 8.34 Respondents in strategic roles are significantly more likely to rate their authorities improvement as substantial (39% cf. 23% of those in operational roles). It is the responses of elected members that drive this difference; over half (54%) of whom perceive substantial improvement in their authority's overall performance.

⁴⁸ Q23 (V1&2)/Q26 (V3,4,5&6) – How do you rate your local authority's rate of improvement in performance overall?

- 8.35 Table A1.25 in Appendix A details all findings among respondents from engaged and non-engaged councils. Respondents from councils that are engaged in the Beacon Scheme are slightly more likely to perceive substantial improvement (33% c.f. 24%) and less likely to perceive slow, steady improvement (18% c.f. 29%).
- 8.36 Respondents were also asked how others would rate their own authority’s improvement in performance using the same scale. Results are shown in Figure 8.1.



- 8.37 Perceptions of others’ ratings of improvement were less positive than respondents’ own ratings. The percentage of respondents who felt others would rate improvement as substantial was less than the percentage who believed themselves that there had been substantial improvement. Similarly, a greater percentage of respondents thought others would perceive little improvement than thought themselves there had been little improvement.
- 8.38 Respondents in strategic roles had a more positive perception of service users’ opinions, this seems to be particularly due to ratings from elected members, 73% of whom (and 63% of strategic respondents) believed service users would see a substantial or fair amount of improvement in their local authority (cf. 50% of operational managers) (see Table A1.26 in Appendix A).

49 Q24 (V1&2)/Q27 (V3,4,5&6) – How do you think that your local authority's improvement is rated by others?

- 8.39 Similarly, strategic managers, particularly elected members, give elevated ratings for:
- Local media – 43% suggesting this group would perceive at least a fair amount of improvement compared to 29% of operational managers (elected members 51%).
 - Local population generally – 46% suggesting this group would perceive at least a fair amount of improvement compared to 29% of operational managers (elected members 60%).
 - Public sector partners – 76% suggesting this group would perceive at least a fair amount of improvement compared to 63% of operational managers.
 - Voluntary sector partners – 64% of elected members suggesting this group would perceive a substantial or a fair amount of improvement compared to 51% of operational respondents.
 - Private sector partners – 60% of elected members suggesting this group would perceive substantial or a fair amount of improvement compared to 45% of operational respondents.
- 8.40 There are no significant variations in response according to whether respondents work for a council engaged or not engaged in the Beacon Scheme.

Councils' approach to improving performance

- 8.41 Given the Beacon Scheme's objective to improve local authority performance by a structured sharing of best practice between authorities, it was important to gain an idea of what methods councils employed to try and improve performance and how highly they rated each method. Respondents were asked the extent to which various methods were important to improving their authority's performance. Table 8.8 presents the results of this question.
- 8.42 One of the core aims of the Beacon Scheme, peer-to-peer learning with other councils comes last in importance, only 23% of respondents considering it important to a great or very great extent. Seeking innovation from outside the council was also perceived to be of relatively low importance, 38% considering it of great importance, although those in strategic roles placed greater significance on this (46% cf. 33% of operational heads). However strengthening relationships with partners, another 'external' method, was more valued; 65% rating it highly.

Table 8.8 Extent to which methods are important to councils' approach to improving performance (Q25/Q28)⁵⁰

<i>Base: All answering</i>						
	% stating great/very great extent					
	<i>Base</i>	<i>Overall</i>	<i>Base</i>	<i>Strategic</i>	<i>Base</i>	<i>Operational</i>
Improving performance measurement techniques	(346)	72%	(144)	68%	(202)	74%
Improving business processes	(344)	70%	(143)	77%	(201)	66%
Improving management processes	(346)	69%	(144)	69%	(202)	69%
Strengthening relationships with partners	(345)	65%	(143)	66%	(202)	64%
Sharing good practice across the council	(344)	55%	(142)	65%	(202)	48%
Increasing accountability	(344)	54%	(142)	56%	(202)	53%
Increasing internal cross-boundary collaboration	(344)	53%	(142)	61%	(202)	48%
Developing and encouraging innovation across services	(344)	53%	(143)	62%	(201)	47%
Increasing consistency of leadership practice	(343)	53%	(142)	61%	(201)	47%
Improving political-managerial working	(343)	48%	(143)	57%	(200)	41%
Using quality techniques for continuous improvement	(343)	46%	(143)	50%	(200)	44%
Increasing review and evaluation activities	(346)	46%	(144)	41%	(202)	50%
Structural change	(346)	46%	(144)	46%	(202)	47%
Strengthening political leadership	(345)	45%	(143)	53%	(202)	39%
Seeking innovation from outside the council	(345)	38%	(143)	46%	(202)	33%
Investment in Human Resource processes	(343)	35%	(143)	43%	(200)	30%
Evaluation methods	(344)	34%	(142)	34%	(202)	34%
Increasing autonomy	(340)	30%	(139)	38%	(201)	24%
Peer to peer learning with other councils	(346)	23%	(144)	23%	(202)	22%

Note: Figures in bold are findings that are significantly different from each other.

8.43 There is a general consistency between the views of strategic and operational managers on the importance of improvement methods. However in a number of instances differences emerged with strategic managers generally placing greater importance on these methods. The only two exceptions to this pattern are 'improving performance measurement techniques' and 'increasing review and evaluation activities', where higher proportions of operational respondents viewed them as particularly important, although differences were not significant.

⁵⁰ Q25 (V1&2)/Q28 (V3,4,5&6) – To what extent are the following methods important to your council's approach to improving performance?

- 8.44 Elected members were more likely to cite the importance of several methods than respondents overall, as listed below (see Table A 1.27 in Appendix A):
- Sharing good practice across the council (75% cf. 55%);
 - Developing and encouraging innovation across services (71% cf. 53%);
 - Increasing consistency of leadership practice (76% cf. 53%);
 - Improving political-managerial working (73% cf. 48%);
 - Using quality techniques for continuous improvement (64% cf. 46%);
 - Strengthening political leadership (71% cf. 45%);
 - Seeking innovation from outside the council (56% cf. 38%).
- 8.45 There is only one method that elected members felt was less important than respondents overall; ‘improving performance measurement techniques’ (58% cf. 72%). Chief executives/heads of policy were more likely than average to cite two methods; increasing internal cross-boundary collaboration (62% cf. 53%) and increasing autonomy (38% cf. 30%). Table A1.27 in Appendix A contains responses from elected members and chief executives/heads of policy.
- 8.46 There were no significant variations in response according to whether respondents worked for a council engaged or not engaged in the Beacon Scheme.

Potential improvements to the Beacon Scheme

- 8.47 All respondents were asked for their opinion on a series of actions that might improve the Beacon Scheme. Respondents were asked to judge to what extent each suggestion might improve the Beacon Scheme on a five-point scale; to a very little extent; to a little extent; to some extent; to a great extent; to a very great extent. Table 8.9 below summarises the proportion of respondents who said that each action might improve the scheme to a great or very great extent.

Table 8.9 Suggested improvements to the Beacon Scheme (Q26/Q29)		
Base – All respondents answering	% state aspect would improve scheme to a great or very great extent	
Increased freedoms and flexibility	(323)	71%
Increased financial incentives	(323)	65%
Themes with stronger focus on tangible outcomes	(320)	58%
Closer links to CPA assessment	(323)	53%
Increased support for dissemination activities	(316)	52%
Themes targeted at different types of authority	(316)	52%
Materials from successful Beacons drawn on by other capacity building initiatives	(308)	40%
Easier application and short-listing process	(317)	39%
Themes aligned with shared priorities	(318)	39%
Increased emphasis on ability of Beacon to disseminate good practice	(316)	37%
More opportunities for collaborative applications between authorities	(316)	37%
Themes linked to new policy initiatives	(321)	37%
Stronger engagement of government departments	(319)	33%
Shorter application and short-listing process	(317)	31%
Themes announced several years in advance	(316)	26%
Increased emphasis on peer support	(317)	25%
More tightly defined themes	(311)	24%
Broader themes	(315)	18%
More testing application and short-listing process	(311)	11%

- 8.48 The two most popular suggested improvements for improving the scheme were for ‘increased freedom and flexibility’ (71% agreed to a great or very great extent) and for ‘increased financial incentives’ (65% agreed).
- 8.49 Generally support was low for changing the scope of Beacon awards; just a quarter of respondents (24%) supporting more tightly defined themes whilst less than a fifth (18%) believed the themes should have a wider focus. This suggests that the remit of current themes is generally appropriate. However, there was widespread support (58% of respondents) for a slight modification to the selected themes in order to give them a stronger focus on more tangible outcomes. There was also majority support (52%) for themes to be more targeted towards different types of authority.

- 8.50 More than half of all respondents (53%) also supported the idea of tying the Beacon Scheme more closely to CPA assessments, suggesting a common desire to have fewer assessment processes.
- 8.51 Respondents appeared to support the notion of spreading ideas and good practice lessons that arise from the Beacon Scheme, but a majority of respondents (52%) supported the suggestion of increased support for dissemination events.
- 8.52 Support was very low for the idea of a more testing application and short-listing process. Just one in nine (11%) of respondents supported this suggestion making it the least popular idea.
- 8.53 The only suggestion that differed between strategic and operational respondents was for 'increased emphasis on ability of Beacon to disseminate good practice'; only 31% of strategic respondents suggested this might improve the Beacon Scheme compared to 41% of operational respondents (see Table A1.6 in Appendix A).
- 8.54 There were some differences by job role but none by elected members (see Table A1.7 in Appendix A). There were no significant differences in suggested improvements to the Beacon Scheme by those who were engaged in the Beacon Scheme and those not engaged (see Table A1.8 in Appendix A).

CHAPTER 9

Conclusions

- 9.1 The key findings and main results of the 2006 survey are summarised in the executive summary of this report.
- 9.2 This report concludes the second of two national surveys of English local authorities carried out as part of the Beacon Scheme impact evaluation, which were designed to collect quantitative evidence in two time periods about:
- Levels of engagement amongst local authorities with the Beacon Scheme and Beacons events;
 - The attitudes of local authority elected members, and officers towards the Beacon Scheme and how it could be improved;
 - The impact of the Beacon Scheme and Beacon events on authority corporate and service performance;
 - Methods employed by local authorities to improve services and stimulate innovation.
- 9.3 Together with the 2004 survey, the 2006 survey results will be explored in the longitudinal analysis, which will be the subject of a subsequent report. This longitudinal report will also draw out implications of the findings for the Beacon Scheme.

