

County Council

27 February 2009

LAA (2008 – 11) Review/Refresh



Report of Lorraine O'Donnell, Assistant Chief Executive Cabinet Portfolio Holder: Councillor Simon Henig, Leader of the Council/Councillor Clive Robson, Deputy Leader of the Council

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek formal sign-off of the 2008 – 11 LAA Refresh in order to comply with the statutory requirement on the authority to have an LAA in place with targets for 2008/9, 2009/10 and 2010/11.

Background

2. The new framework for LAAs involves an annual 'Review' to be carried out in the Autumn/Winter by Government Office on behalf of Government. This is followed by the opportunity to revise LAA indicators and targets in March 2009. This is known as the LAA 'Refresh'.
3. The 'Review' process involved two submissions to Government Office setting out progress on delivery and the action being taken to fill data gaps. The County Durham Partnership and five thematic partnerships put together information to respond to both the first and second phase of the Review and these were completed and submitted in September and December 2008. These reports indicated that a positive start has been made to deliver against the LAA targets, new and innovative ways of working are being developed to address priorities and work is on-going to fill any data gaps.
4. The final element of the Review/Refresh is due to be completed and submitted to GONE by 2 March 2009. This must include any proposals to change LAA indicators or targets. The Government does not expect many of the LAA targets to be renegotiated during the three year lifetime of the LAA unless there are compelling reasons for this.
5. The County Durham Partnership agreed that the Refresh element of the Review should focus on:
 - Capturing the vision and political aspirations of Members of the new authority.
 - Ensuring that new priorities identified via the JSNA, Community Safety Assessment and review of the County Durham Economic Strategy are captured within the LAA.
 - Ensuring that no key emerging priorities are missed (this was done by holding an event to provide the opportunity for key partners and thematic partnerships to share their plans for 2009 – 11).

- Gathering evidence of delivery arrangements for all designated indicators.
6. An event was held on 10 September 2008 to allow thematic partnerships and key organisations to highlight emerging priorities that should be taken into account in the Review/Refresh of the LAA. This event also provided the opportunity for partners to consider issues emerging from the JSNA, review of the Economic Strategy and the Community Safety Assessment. The information shared at this event provided confirmation that the LAA has captured the right issues for County Durham.
 7. There are some important issues that were discussed in detail during the development of the LAA which need to be monitored over the year ahead, these are:
 - Child poverty
 - Breast feeding
 - Early years – readiness for school
 8. Issues emerging that had not previously been considered by the Partnership are:
 - End of life care.
 - Counter terrorism.
 - Children with complex needs.
 9. It has been agreed that these issues should be monitored during 2009/10 by the relevant thematic partnership with a view to adding as designated or local indicators in the LAA in 2009/10 if this is considered appropriate.

Vision and Political Aspirations:

10. The guidance is clear that LAAs should not just be based on statistical evidence. Political vision and ambition are also seen as being equally important. As part of the LAA Review/Refresh process a discussion was held with Members of Cabinet and the Overview & Scrutiny Management Committee (O&SMC). Members of O&SMC raised the issue of highway and footpath maintenance, particularly linked to the issue of accessibility. They also raised the potential need to review economic and housing (affordable housing and homelessness) targets to reflect the impact of the economic downturn.
11. Cabinet Members discussed the LAA Review/Refresh at a special workshop on 8 January 2009. The aim of this discussion was to ensure that the LAA captures the issues that democratically elected Members consider to be important and believe would ensure that the County moves forward in accordance with their aspirations for the area. They concluded that as the LAA is based on robust evidence no changes should be made at the present time. The new authority has not yet fully developed its vision and aspirations for the future of County Durham. This will be done over the year ahead and is likely to have a strong influence on the next LAA Review. It was also noted

that the outcome of the Place Survey was not yet available and this information should be used to guide any future changes.

12. At Cabinet on 5 February 2009 it was agreed that:
 - The designated and local indicators in the LAA should remain unchanged but the Council should initiate further negotiation on the economic and housing targets.
 - Targets for indicators covered by the Place Survey should be negotiated once the Place Survey data is available.
 - The LAA should be signed off by Full Council on 27 February.
 - The agreement of any outstanding targets should be delegated to the Leader in discussion with the Chief Executive.

LAA Refresh

13. The attached sheet (Appendix 2) lists the LAA indicators and targets. Gaps in data need to be filled by 2 March 2009. This includes targets related to indicators dependent upon Place Survey information. The results of the Place Survey are due to be received on 18 February.

Economic Indicators

14. On 10 February Government Office circulated a briefing on the Refresh of targets impacted by the economic downturn. It is acknowledged that the economic downturn and credit crisis are likely to make it more difficult to achieve certain targets, for example around increasing the housing supply and reducing worklessness. Equally they note targets which might become easier to achieve due to the same external factors, for example reducing traffic congestion, and CO2 emissions.
15. The government have stated that where local economic circumstances change and where there is uncertainty about future economic conditions, their priority for local delivery is that local partnerships respond flexibly to support local communities and businesses. Local partners need to remain focussed on delivery of positive outcomes locally. They believe that there is a risk that protracted discussions about the levels of targets at this stage would detract from timely, effective action on the ground.
16. They have confirmed:
 - They will not seek to raise targets that will become less challenging with the economic downturn.
 - They have confirmed that the CAA assessment will take account of the economic downturn and the local action being taken to mitigate severe local impacts and prepare for future growth. Red flags will not automatically follow a missed target.
 - They will remove the 'lockdown' on the most severely affected indicators. This means that where targets on these indicators are revised as part of the 2009/10 annual review (completing March 2010), these will be the targets that count for reward purposes. The removal of the lockdown will apply to the following indicators in the County Durham LAA – NI 151, 152, 154, 155, 166 and 171.

- With perhaps the single biggest indicator of concern being NI 154, CLG will review the Housing and Planning Delivery Grant to ensure that local authorities will continue to be rewarded for maintaining housing delivery.

17. Government departments have agreed, in general, that they should not be proposing to renegotiation of LAA targets. The exceptions to this are where LAA indicators that are currently without agreed targets or baselines or where there was a specific agreement made at LAA sign off to review targets at Refresh. Where local partnerships request to adjust the levels of LAA targets due to changing economic conditions, these will need to be weighed against robust local evidence provided by the local partnership, which demonstrates a severe impact of changing economic conditions on the local economy. Government Offices are required to ensure that the local evidence presented meets the following criteria:

- Robust data which reflects the economic impact on the LAA area as a whole and therefore has a significant impact on the LAA target
- Evidence is based on issues specific to the locality rather than general national trends
- Evidence is based on recent data which has been collected since the sign-off of the LAA
- Evidence has a direct impact on the indicator in question
- Evidence of changing economic circumstances is balanced with evidence of how the local partnership is taking action to meet the target or mitigate against the negative impact of these changes

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18. Following discussions with the Economic Partnership it is proposed that the County Durham economic targets are not changed at this stage. Although it is clear that it will be extremely difficult to meet the existing targets, the impact of mitigating actions is not yet known and the data lag associated with these indicators makes it difficult for accurate new targets to be set at this time.

Next Steps

19. The following steps will be taken to complete the LAA Refresh:

- Place Survey results to be received from the Audit Commission (due)
- Place Survey data to be used to set targets (as soon as received)
- Negotiation on targets with Government Office to be completed (as soon as possible)
- County Durham Partnership to sign off Refresh (23 February)
- Full Council to sign off Refresh and delegate decisions regarding the sign-off of outstanding targets (27 February)
- Refresh submitted to Government Office (27 February)
- Refresh sent to Department of Communities and Local Government (2 March)
- Refreshed LAA in place for 1 April 2009.

Recommendations

20. Council are asked to

- Note the report.
- Sign off the data and targets as set out in Appendix 2.
- Delegate decisions regarding the sign off of data gaps to the Leader and Chief Executive.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Local Government Reorganisation

Agreement of the LAA and future reviews will be undertaken by the new council.

Finance

n/a

Staffing

n/a

Equality and diversity

Issues related to equalities and diversity have been taken into account in agreeing the LAA priorities.

Accommodation

n/a

Crime and disorder

Key issues relating to addressing crime and disorder have been taken into account in agreeing the LAA priorities.

Sustainability

A full sustainability assessment of LAA priorities has been undertaken.

Human rights

n/a

Localities and Rurality

The needs of specific localities and rural areas will be addressed through work to achieve priority outcomes.

Young people

Priorities of the Children's Trust have been taken into account in agreeing the LAA priorities.