Local Government
Improvement
and Development

PAS
planning advisory service

Monitoring that matters
towards a better AMR

Contents

Introduction

Annual monitoring reports can be a useful local tool to advertise the achievements of good planning. However, they have often been treated as a tick-box exercise for central government. Recent changes to the requirements for monitoring have opened up the opportunity for authorities to shape how they use this valuable process. In a world of reduced resources and less prescription from central government we need to be absolutely clear on the purpose and value of monitoring and reporting.

Councils are now responsible for their own performance management and are accountable to the public, rather than central government. Monitoring and evaluation will be more important than ever if councils are going to demonstrate their effectiveness and value for money. What is essential to monitor and what can you tell about the value of the planning service from this information?

Planning delivers the council's spatial objectives for its place through planning policy and the development management process. The monitoring report can demonstrate to the authority, its partners, fee payers and tax payers what priorities the planning service is using to make decisions about how the area will look and function.

The Localism Bill proposes the removal of the requirement for local planning authorities to produce an annual monitoring report for Government, while retaining the overall duty to monitor. The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Bob Neill MP, wrote to authorities on 30 March 2011 announcing withdrawal of guidance on local plan monitoring. Authorities can now choose which targets and indicators to include in the report as long as they are in line with the relevant UK and EU legislation. Their primary purpose is to share the performance and achievements of the planning service with the local community.

The Planning Advisory Service produced this resource to summarise and share the lessons learned by a group of pilot authorities who received consultancy support from February 2010 to reappraise and review the content and process of producing their AMR. We can see the general principles that these authorities have adopted to show what planning is doing and the difference it's making. You may find this report useful if you are considering making changes to how your authority monitors and reports about planning.

The benefits of monitoring and reporting

Good monitoring and reporting showcases the work of the authority and its partners. It tells communities what planning is doing and who it is working with. It is central to the council's overall consideration of how it is performing and where to focus efforts in the future

When a monitoring report is done well, it can:

- be an effective way to gather evidence for future policy, and support development management decisions
- show how planning is delivering corporate objectives
- help communities understand the purpose of planning in their area
- demonstrate real outcomes such as sites regenerated, houses built and jobs created
- evaluate the effectiveness of planning policy and decision making
- help build collaborative policy approaches across the council, with neighbourhoods, partnerships and with the wider community
- identify areas where objectives aren't being met and changes to policy or development management are necessary
- show progress in preparing local plans against the ambitions set out in the council's local development scheme.

Monitoring and reporting should focus on locally important issues. It should draw out what actions need to be done to achieve the vision in the local plan.

Effective monitoring and reporting requires corporate support. Any reporting activities in the planning service should be a part of the overall local performance framework of the council. This means they need to be linked to local priorities and corporate goals.

Good monitoring and reporting will assist councillors in their scrutiny function, and help communities to understand the impact of their own engagement in the planning process. It will also be a useful tool for neighbourhood planning – encouraging communities to engage in future policy making, and helping them understand where neighbourhood plans 'sit' in the whole context of a particular place.

Keep it simple

Monitoring reports need to be published annually under the current legislation, but could be done more often if useful for the authority and community in advance of proposals in the Localism Bill. The process should be managed by an officer who understands the purpose of policy monitoring and evaluation and can explain this to others.

Use a structured approach, with the right people

Start by bringing together the right people and establish a common understanding of what you are trying to achieve. Officers and councillors need to be clear on the purpose of your reporting and how it fits with corporate performance reporting and decision-making. In future, you may need to ask the community what they want to know.

Work with others to agree on the choice of indicators to report and how different parts of the council need to work together to gather the information.

Treat the production of the report as a project with a start, end and key milestones. This will help you manage the quality and cost.

Get support from a senior officer or councillor

Having support from an officer on the corporate management team or the portfolio holder will help get the cross-corporate backing required to do a good job and to make sure the value of the exercise to the whole organisation is understood.

Set up the business case and determine your budget

Without central prescription on performance reporting, authorities need tools that help them understand their performance and demonstrate the value added by their services. Creating reports that are recognised as useful by the community and the council will make it easier to secure a production budget.

Use corporate monitoring arrangements if possible

Corporate resources for policy monitoring vary greatly across authorities from large, sophisticated teams in unitary or county

authorities to part-time officers in small districts. Where they exist, corporate resources can be used to support the evidence base. Where this isn't an option, consider establishing a task and finish group of key people with access to relevant information to progress it.

Some authorities have successful joint monitoring across the council. They have invested time in bringing partners on-board, and ensuring that they understand the benefits of using a shared evidence base and systems as a basis for commissioning services and further research.

Joint reporting could be a more efficient approach as long as duplication is avoided. There are potential overlaps between corporate plans, community strategies, economic assessments, climate change strategies and sustainability appraisal. It may be useful to combine all reports that deal with place-shaping subjects, while ensuring that the outputs are useful to their intended audience and fulfil the relevant statutory requirements.

Useful themes to include

You might find it helpful to see what other authorities have done to show progress on strategic objectives through monitoring and reporting. Here is a summary of some of the themes and indicators used to monitor important functions of the planning service. They are illustrated with local authority examples to show how the information was presented in a monitoring report.

The value added to development

To demonstrate the value added by development management, conservation and enforcement activity you will want to show:

- whether the development was right for the place
- the quality of development and its environment
- user and neighbour experience
- progress on infrastructure delivery.

This requires assessing the impact of developments on a regular basis with a variety of measures. The measures will come from a combination of outcome evaluation and process evaluation. For example 'affordable housing numbers provided' can be translated into the outcome of 'number of families housed' and 'number removed from waiting lists'.

The following measures may be appropriate for your place:

- the outcomes from major projects
- improvements to schemes or negotiated benefits as a result of discussions with applicants
- issues recommended for review where decisions are taken contrary to policy
- key development trends and how they relate to local policies
- the impact of local development orders on planning activity
- improvements to the environment resulting from enforcement activity
- the benefits from section 106 agreements and completion of infrastructure
- the results of consultation on places and built developments
- appeal results.

The quality of development

Measuring the quality of development could be done through the ratings from one of the design standards, including:

- Building for Life - Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE)
- Code for Sustainable Homes
- BRE Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM) code
- By design - CABE

The ratings can be recorded and used to track the proportions of development being built with these characteristics e.g. BREEAM 'very good'. However, these are only one aspect of development quality since the experience for users and neighbours should be included. You could also monitor the accessibility of development through travel plan outcomes.

The **London Borough of Barking and Dagenham** monitors the number of major developments that achieve 'excellent' and 'very good' BREEAM ratings. Last year the target was not met (Figure 1). The commentary in the monitoring report explains that the council are working to implement sustainable design standards. The report lists the developments that committed to standards at the planning consent stage. These include highly rated code for sustainable homes developments.

INDICATOR	Proportion of major new dwellings achieving a given score for Ecohomes or BREEAM assessment		
Indicator type	Local indicator CR 1 (b)		
Objective	High Quality Built Environment		
Target	Assessment Method	Strategic Development	Major Development
	BREEAM	Excellent	Very good
Outcome	1 scheme achieved the BREEAM excellent standard, 2 the BREEAM good standard (ecohome very good)		
Target met		❌	Trend ⬆

Figure 1 - The council's targets for BREEAM standards on major development were not met in 2009/10. LB Barking and Dagenham 2009/10.

Planning performance

This is an important area for monitoring and reporting. It might include information on the planning service's budget, how many applications were received and approved, and customer satisfaction of the process.

The **London Borough of Westminster** reported on the percentage of applications that were processed within the eight and 13 week targets (Figure 2).
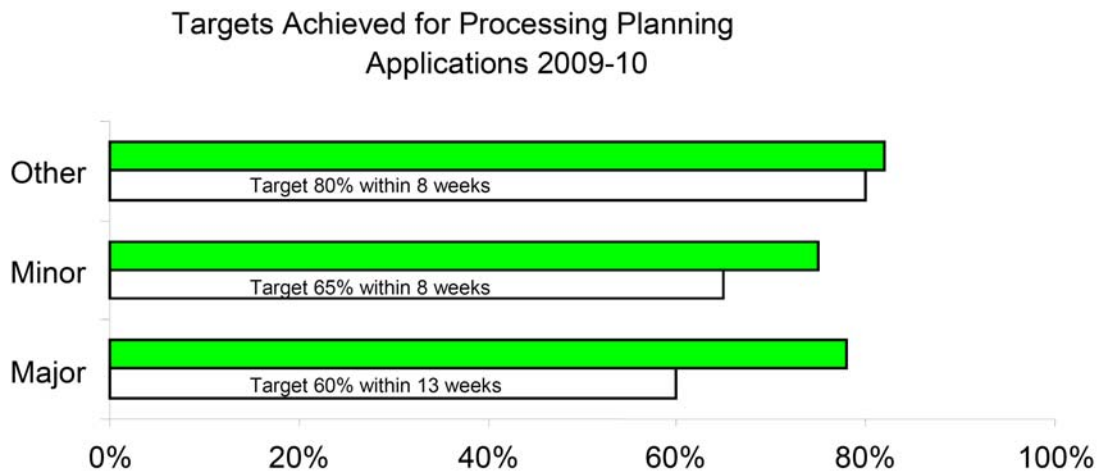

Figure 2 - LB Westminster show their performance in processing planning applications. LB Westminster Annual Monitoring Report 2009/10

User and neighbour experience

User surveys are valuable tools in understanding outcomes for occupants and neighbours. These may be designed during the consideration of a planning proposal and done in partnership with the developer. Developers should also be interested in learning about the impacts of their developments. These surveys can also be done as part of a general council survey of residents. LB Hackney use member tours to evaluate completed developments.

Planners at **Plymouth City Council** undertook sustainable neighbourhood assessments (SNAs) as a part of the plan making process. These profiles included accounts from local residents about the state of the facilities and other characteristics of the neighbourhoods. This can be used as baseline to measure changes resulting from new development.

Infrastructure delivery

It is important to report this. Has infrastructure unlocked other sites, provided a facility or had other benefits? This is where you explain how section 106 obligations, the community infrastructure levy and unilateral undertakings have been used.

The **London Borough of Wandsworth** report on how they are using planning obligations to provide infrastructure improvements. Through the monitoring report, they show how the funds are directly related to a new development or additional facilities that are needed to improve the scheme. Their monitoring report shows that in 2009/10, nine developments were completed, including over £236,000 financial contributions (Figure 3). The commentary in the report compares this with the agreements signed in 2009/11 for new developments. If implemented, these could bring in £1,861,514. The report explains that the financial obligations will increase as core strategy policies were implemented.

Analysing how completed development relates to the original triggers for supporting infrastructure is critical to ensuring that the right infrastructure happens at the right time. For example, monitoring in the **Thames Gateway** shows housing is providing homes with more children than originally estimated – so fewer housing units are triggering the thresholds for schools.

Using maps can help explain how infrastructure has improved accessibility. The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham use a map (
Figure 4) to show how recent developments have improved accessibility to primary schools by foot or public transport.

Significant effects from sustainability appraisal

Sustainability appraisal produces a great deal of baseline information to support your reporting. When monitoring significant effects, a comparison can be made between the effects predicted in the sustainability appraisal and the actual effects measured during implementation.

Application Number	Completion date	Address	Type of contribution	Value of contribution
2001/2599	19/06/2009	177 Wandsworth High Street, SW18	Financial contribution upgrade Dutch Yard and lighting provision. Pedestrian access.	£6,500 Dutch Yard contribution.
2006/4033	18/01/2010	Charterhouse Works, 21 Eltringham Street, SW18	25% affordable housing provision (14 units) and phasing of, alterations to footway, diversion utility services, CPZ hours financial contribution, car park management plan, car club, secure cycle parking, considerate contractors.	Pedestrian walkway and footpath contribution of £40,000
2007/1869	31/12/2009	81-85 St Johns Hill, SW11	a) Highway works. b) Financial assistance for transport vouchers, cycles, car club. c) Construction management plan.	Controlled parking zone £25,000, £16,000 highway works, £25,000 off-site railway improvements, £11,500 facilities, £22,000 public footway
2007/3234	01/11/2009	63-65 Garratt Lane, SW18	25% affordable. Parking management. New footways/crossovers. Restriction of commercial uses. Construction management. Travel plan. Car club and travel assistance.	
2007/3884	31/03/2010	249-251 Merton Road, SW18	Deed of variation to existing to provide: (i) contribution to 2 bus stops and (ii) £20,000 for environmental improvements in vicinity.	£20,000 public transport, £36,121 public footway, £20,000 environmental improvements
2007/4761	08/10/2009	KFH House, Norstead Place, SW15	Deed of variation of the existing agreement to provide i) contribution to footway ii) incentives to residents to use transport other than cars	£14,000 public footway
2007/5807	15/02/2010	St Barnabas Vicarage, 430 Merton Road, SW18	To secure affordable housing.	
2008/1487	08/01/2010	Land adjoining Earlsfield Station, Magdalen Road, SW18	Affordable housing, car club, CPZ contribution, green travel plan, public footway deposit, parking management plan, on-street servicing restriction, off-site railway improvement contribution, countdown facilities contribution, public convenience works, highways works contribution.	
2008/5115	14/10/2009	58 Fishponds Road, SW17	The premises shall return to use as a single dwelling if the Special Needs use ceases.	
Total				**£236,121**

**Figure 3 - The contributions from new development toward local infrastructure.
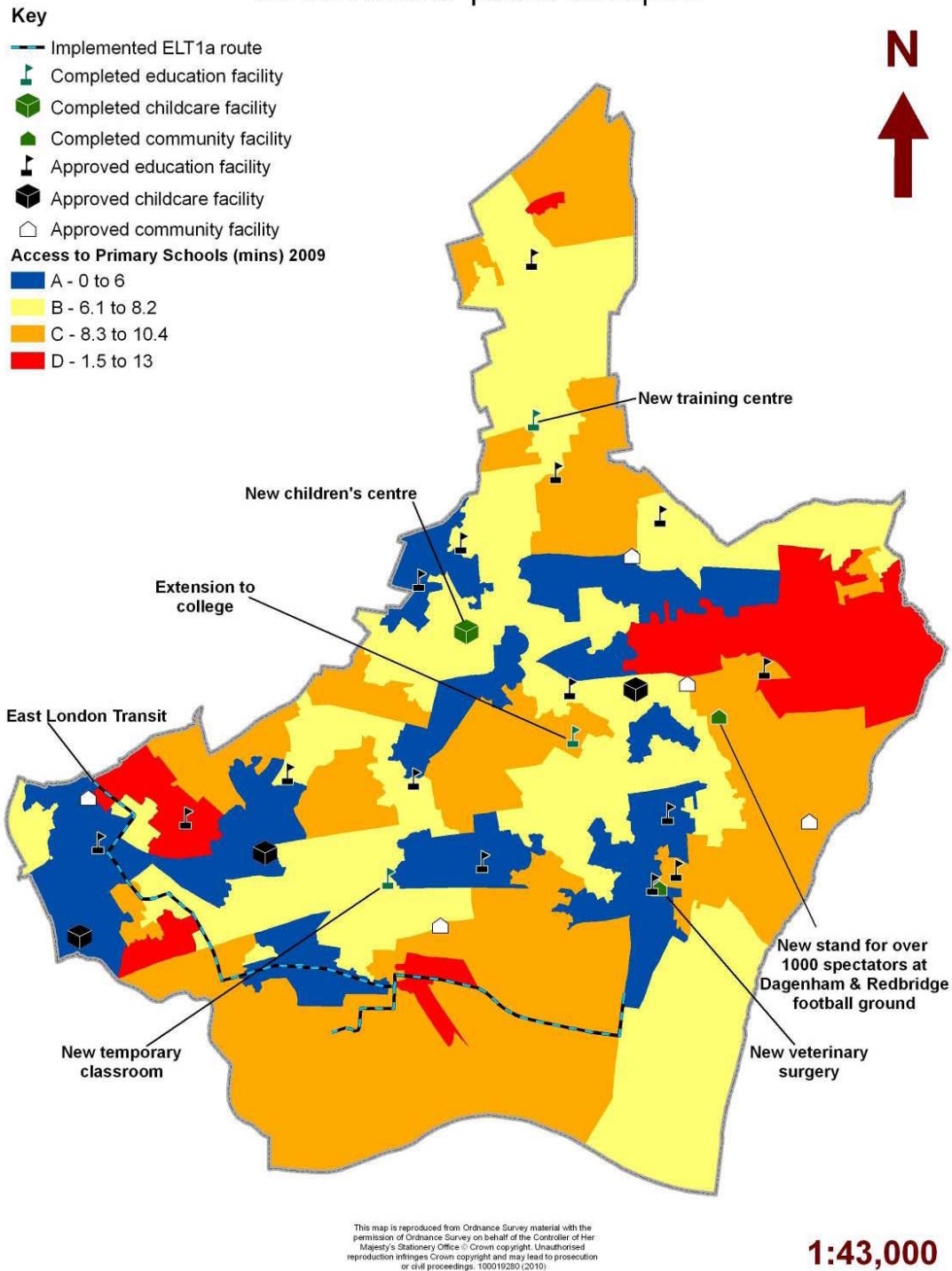Table reconstructed from Annual Monitoring Report, LB Wandsworth 2009/10.**

Figure 4 - Map showing the approved and completed education, childcare and community facilities. Demonstrates how new infrastructure is increasing accessibility. Annual Monitoring Report, Barking and Dagenham 2009/10.

Design and production

Through our work with local authorities, we have identified five stages in the monitoring and reporting process:

1. Identify the priorities to be reported
2. Decide how progress on the priorities will be shown and what evidence will be used;
3. Agree the method(s) for collecting information and evidence
4. Analyse the data and write it up
5. Publish and maximise the use of the information

Stage 1: Identify the priorities for reporting

In this stage you need to decide who the report is for and what you are going to report. Since monitoring reports are now for the public rather than the Secretary of State, authorities may want to make a stronger focus of reporting on locally important issues.

Choose priorities

Thinking through which are the most useful and most significant local issues, and linking these to output focused measures is key to a crisp and readable monitoring report. The council and community priorities will be stated in a range of documents produced by the council and its partners.

The choice of priorities to monitor should be agreed with the portfolio holder and chair of the development management or planning committee. This will prevent the process becoming entirely officer-driven. If you have committed to report on indicators in adopted development plans or guidance, use these to show whether you are meeting local priorities. If you don't have this context available, then you may wish to create additional indicators.

Examples of priorities for outcomes could be:
- regeneration of the town centre
- provision of rural homes for local people
- bolstering the sustainability of rural communities
- homes and social facilities where the community needs them
- improved access to affordable housing
- useable play space for pre school and school aged children
- vital and vibrant local shopping centres with a good range of community facilities
- good health for young and old
- access to jobs requiring a range of skills and qualities
- development of key strategic development sites.

Focus the report on facts and achievements

A good monitoring report answers the following questions:

What's happening on the ground?
Report on what has been delivered on the ground and focus on the outputs. For example, start by showing the number of houses completed and expand on what this means for people. Who got housed? Are prices affordable? Did the development trigger the need for a new GP practice? This will show the developments that were completed and the implications this had for the community.

What value is the planning service adding?
This could be about how many applications were processed and progress on policy documents against the local development scheme. Include service improvement measures such as design panels or a triage system to sieve through the most important applications for senior officer attention.

How is planning contributing to strategic priorities?
Include the wider benefits of what the planning service has done. For example, if an area action plan was adopted, did it bring key development sites forward? The links between productivity, efficiency and effectiveness in the planning service, and the outcomes the service achieves, should be made explicit in the report. Is the planning service working with other services or neighbouring authorities and is this effective?

How are you engaging the community?
The report might set out how engagement with the community has resulted in the choice of indicators and priorities. For example, do planners use neighbourhood forums to discuss proposed developments and what difference has this made to the schemes that have come forward? There may be an opportunity to use the monitoring report to inform the statement of community involvement.

Stage 2: Decide how you will use data to show progress

To show progress on priorities you will need to measure changes – things being built, plans put in place, people being housed. Once you have chosen a set of priorities, you will need to choose indicators that show how things are changing.

Choose indicators

It might be useful to think about choosing indicators that 'tell a story'. This might mean using several indicators from different sources. For example, the 'story of the housing position' in an area might use data on any or all of the following:

- annual completions
- 5 year supply
- housing trajectory
- affordable housing stock and completions
- location of completions in relation to policy direction
- type of homes completed in relation to existing stock in house type
- sale prices
- homeless households housed (outcome)
- affordability ratio (outcome)
- households accepted as homeless
- income and unemployment data
- new jobs data
- housing market analyses
- qualitative data on stock condition or differential geographical analyses.

Using bundles of indicators allows for a more rounded picture to develop. For example, **Plymouth City Council** put together data on the employment rate and employment land delivered. This analysis tells a less positive but more insightful story than the good news that each individual indicator is on track. Figure 5 shows that the high level of employment land delivered in 2008/09 coincided with a fall in the employment rate.

If Plymouth had looked at the data separately, they would have seen that the overall employment rate of 73.6 per cent exceeds the local area agreement target of 73 per cent. However, this is only part of the story. By analysing employment rate and employment land together, Plymouth were able to identify an issue and consider whether policy changes or other measures were needed.
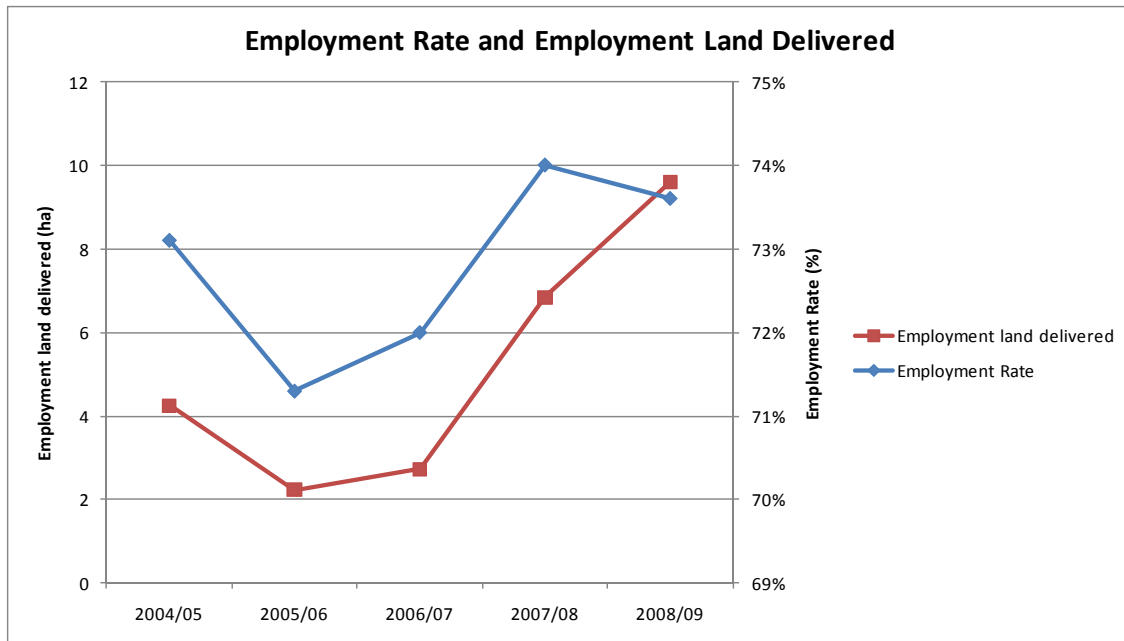
Figure 5 - Shows a fall in employment rate that coincides with an increase in employment land delivered. Annual Monitoring Report, Plymouth 2008/09

Using more than one indicator also gives flexibility. Not every indicator needs to be updated each year (unless this would skew the results). For example, evidence surveys on the market may be updated every two to four years whilst development completions would be updated annually.

Reading Borough Council used a principle called 'COUNT - Collect Once, Use Numerous Times' for monitoring the Reading Central Area Action Plan. They also set principles that reflected the relevance of indicators to local residents and key stakeholders.

Step 3: Design systems and collect data

Select the data you want to use

Councils have been efficient in collecting information to explain progress and monitor the impact of planning outcomes.

The steps are:

1. establish what data has already been collected in the council
2. establish what data you need to collect in the future, and
3. design and put in place the systems to collect the data.

Here are some basic principles for selecting data:

- avoid duplication by checking to see if the data is already gathered through corporate monitoring
- use quantitative and qualitative information that is valuable to your analysis
- look beyond planning - enhance the analysis with information from partners, and the voluntary and private sector
- be honest - inappropriate data is no substitute if what you really want doesn't exist
- focus on gathering information that shows whether planning is meeting local priorities.

Useful data comes from a wide range of sources, including:

- base data from for example the National Census of Population (Census), UK Labour Market Statistics (Nomis), National Land Use Database (NLUD)
- evidence studies undertaken for the local plan and plan updates, including sustainability appraisal baseline information
- evidence studies undertaken for other strategies e.g. climate change strategy, economic strategy, State of the Environment Reports
- local place based and thematic surveys
- ward profiles
- parish information including that from parish plan work
- results of 'place check' exercises – Urban Design Alliance (UDAL)
- national and local indicators
- joint strategic needs assessment data
- police crime records.

Work with partners to gather the data

Work with corporate partners to collect data. This is a minimum requirement for successful monitoring even if it is not possible to convince corporate partners that planning's reporting should be the only place-based monitoring and reporting the council does. Use existing data resources such as the local observatory (local web based resource with data on people, places, economy etc .

To ensure consistency and to avoid duplication, partners should agree:

- responsibilities for collection, collation and storage
- evaluation methods (see below)
- the spatial level (town, ward, parish, neighbourhood, district, etc)
- specification of the data and indicators where appropriate
- specification of protocols for storage and format of data
- the trigger for update of data
- timing of data collection and report production
- specification for the data output reports
- arrangements for interpretation and distribution
- suitable protocol recorded for successive staff to use

Make data collection part of the day job

Including data collection as part of the mainstream work of all officers is an effective way of creating a common sense of purpose. This will help you look at achievements across development management and policy, and make the task a shared responsibility. You will also save costs by not having to employ consultants to analyse or collect what is essentially your own data.

Work with your IT support team to consider how your current or new IT systems can give you access to up-to-date data for reporting and providing the service. Make sure you understand how data can be stored, retrieved, analysed and linked to other data sets (such as those generated through case management and enforcement).

Officers need to be well briefed and trained to record relevant information at each stage of the development process including:

- a brief description of development scheme
- aspects of the scheme were improved through negotiation
- tools that were used to lever changes (policies or guidance)
- additional benefits achieved for the public and users of the scheme

Challenge your evaluation and recording methods

Your data needs to be fit for purpose. Use tried and tested tools produced by others, such as design standards or published advice on travel plans.

Be challenging about the data you produce in-house. Ask the following questions:

- are we including the right people in our surveys?
- does the data we collect support the priorities?
- what does this data really tell us?

When looking at data to demonstrate the value added by development management, ask:

- what are officers recording on scheme negotiations?
- how and where is it recorded and retrieved?
- what does it tell you and how is it analysed?
- do our systems link section 106 agreements to the facilities they provide?

Stage 4: Analyse data and write it up

The way in which both quantitative and qualitative data is analysed and explained is critical in determining the value of the monitoring report, and whether its audience finds it useful. To remain up-to-date, data can be released online prior to inclusion in a report. It involves integrating analyses from different indicators and data sets and focussing on the four questions you are trying to answer:

- What's happening on the ground?
- What value is the planning service adding?
- How is planning contributing to strategic priorities?
- How are you engaging the community?

All of these questions need to be answered by explaining the impact of planning decisions and activities on the local community. This section covers some ways of analysing data to find useful information to report to the council and the community.

Look for trends

Looking for and explaining trends provides decision makers with useful information about changes over time. Trend analysis is useful for tracing blips in the delivery of specific developments. For example, **Milton Keynes Council** record carbon emissions, gross value added and bus patronage in a time series.

Trends can only be recorded over an appropriate time period. Reporting annually on floor space and house building is useful, but probably wouldn't work for structural changes to the housing stock where you need to look over a longer time period. **Plymouth City Council** uses National Land Use Database information to track changes in vacant and derelict land. The changes in their 2009/10 report showed that despite the affect of the recession on the development industry, there was not a dramatic increase of category C – derelict land and buildings.

Use a wide range of data sources

A wider range of pertinent data sources will result in a fuller picture of a trend that shows meaningful information. For example, to report on 'supporting improvements in education' you could use:

- information about completions and refurbishments of new schools
- access to service and facilities by public transport, walking and cycling
- the results of satisfaction surveys of users of new establishments.

The more closely subjects can be aligned the more likely a sense of place is achieved as opposed to commentary on a series of topics.

Record actions

The reporting should clearly explain what the issues are, the recommended actions for intervention, and the desired effect. The resulting actions need to be assigned to someone with a deadline for completion. The effectiveness of the action can be picked up in the next round of reporting.

Southend on Sea Borough Council summarise actions from the findings of the monitoring process in the executive summary of their report. These relate to changes to the local development scheme during the monitoring period and what will need to happen to get back on track. **LB Barking and Dagenham** make clear recommendations in the conclusion of their monitoring reports.

Write the report using the priorities

Consider the needs of your audience. Local government performance will be judged by its communities, so local leaders will need to receive tailored, area-specific and prioritised information. Residents will need accessible information on how the council is meeting their needs and aspirations.

Combining information on related objectives to give a full story is the aim. The objectives, and the policies designed to deliver them,

are rarely mutually exclusive. They come as a package in a policy document and so their impacts should be considered together. For example, if progress is being examined and explained on both a regeneration objective and an economic development objective, they should be considered together. The actions to achieve these objectives are linked so they need to be explained together.

Follow a structure and keep it transparent

Some users will need to get to the heart of the information quickly so use executive summaries and key findings picking out key areas of interest. People take in information in different ways so use a combination of diagrams, pictures, graphs and tables with plain English explanations.

The benefit of a transparent report is that a wide range of readers will be able to understand what it means for them. If too much planning specific jargon is used, partners and the community may not be able to understand whether certain policies have been successful in their aims.

For example, the **University of West England** looked at annual monitoring reports to assess the impact of spatial planning policies on health and well-being. They explained that Plymouth's report "clearly sets out progress for each policy and where a policy is failing, states the measures being taken to address this". A clear and honest reporting style helps partners engage with the report.

The following points on style may be useful:

- use plain English
- follow corporate style guides
- vary the content from year to year to keep the length of the document down and keep the issues fresh
- identify trends from different time series
- highlight issues and key indicators that demonstrate policy impact
- celebrate major project outcomes and the contribution of planning to achieve these
- make recommendations on areas for change
- keep the full indicator data and full local development scheme progress in the appendices
- use 'at a glance' formats such as a traffic light system
- use new photographs each time you publish.

Stage 5: Publicise

Corporate and political leadership support is essential for convincing others of the value of your report. Think about how your report will be used while you are managing its production.

Tips to broaden the readership of the monitoring report:

- publish data as you get it and consider more regular online reporting
- send to key audience members such as councillors, heads of service, team leaders, parish councils and community groups
- brief the corporate management team through a presentation
- run briefing sessions for planning staff
- offer briefing sessions to other services
- present at the developers' forum, design panel, and stakeholder groups
- run a user survey to get feedback from readers
- brief and provide copies to local members of parliament
- provide in printed and electronic formats.

This year **Plymouth City Council** promoted their monitoring report in a press release, an article in the local newspaper and through their planning newsletter which is sent to 5,000 people.

Conclusion

The requirements for monitoring and reporting will change with the enactment of the Localism Bill. It is down to planners to consult with their community, councillors and other partners to determine which priorities and indicators the planning service should monitor under the new system. As a sector, there is a room for improvement in how we report on our achievements in policy and development management. If you are making changes to your monitoring and reporting, and you would like to share them with the sector, please get in touch with us at pas@local.gov.uk.

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PAS is part of the **Local Government Group**. We are
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