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Frontline agencies in partnership

The use of outcomes measurement systems within housing and homelessness organisations

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(*charities, voluntary organisations, community groups and social enterprises)

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Executive Summary and Recommendations

In April 2007 the Performance Hub commissioned Homeless Link to investigate the adoption of outcomes monitoring systems by third sector housing and homelessness organisations.

Housing and homelessness organisations have been exploring the use of outcomes measurement systems for the last five years. A key driver for this has been the IMPACT programme, delivered in London by the London Housing Foundation and Triangle Consulting. With the majority of the UK's homelessness services delivered in London, the widespread uptake of new approaches to outcomes measurement in the capital has triggered considerable dissemination of learning across the country.

Another major driver of outcomes based monitoring and evaluation practice has been a change in the funding environment. Supporting People, the main funding stream for commissioned services for vulnerable people (including those experiencing homelessness), led to a step change in service quality through the introduction of the first nationwide quality assessment framework for supported housing and homelessness organisations. This framework is now being replaced with outcomes measurement systems, implemented at the local level by Supporting People commissioners, who use outcome indicators drawn from a national basket, as well as some that are locally set.

In the housing and homelessness sector, outcome information is collected in four ways: by organisations who wish to assess the progress their clients are making; at a management level by organisations wanting to show their effectiveness; across a funding stream to show overall effectiveness; and at a policy level to justify the benefits of a programme in comparison to others. Tensions exist within organisations, as well as between organisations and their funders or commissioners, in the different purposes of data collection at each of these levels. One outcomes measurement system cannot necessarily provide all stakeholders with all of the information they require.

Despite an overall trend towards outcomes measurement, some housing and homelessness organisations have not adopted this approach due to values embedded in their organisational culture and how they perceive their clients. This research found that some organisational cultures are not well suited to outcome-oriented monitoring and evaluation, and show resistance to measuring the effectiveness of the work they undertake with clients.

However, outcomes measurement has been adopted by a critical mass of organisations working with homeless people and is widely recognised as effective monitoring and evaluation practice. There is a range of different systems on offer, and such systems have proven useful in showing the benefits of services for clients.

Homeless Link would like to thank all those who participated in the research for their candid responses, and to Richard Andrew for undertaking some of the interviews. We would also like to thank colleagues within Homeless Link and more widely across academia who provided useful feedback on drafts of this report. Finally, we would like to thank the Performance Hub for supporting this research and providing very useful input at every stage.

Key recommendations

For funders

- Funders should consult organisations and service users on the design of both the outcomes and indicators, and on the system used to measure these.
- Funders should also view the adoption of an outcomes approach as a long-term change and expect at least an 18-month period for piloting and capacity building.
- Funders should consider providing support (financial and in-kind) for agencies so they can develop new systems where appropriate.
- When rolling a system out to providers, funders should consider facilitating benchmarking activities and making data available across organisations.

For service providers

- Organisations should consult widely with staff and service users prior to the adoption of a new outcomes measurement system, and incorporate feedback into the design stage.
- Organisations should consider investing in internal systems to ensure both consistency of use of an outcomes system across their organisation and for the production of management data.
- If organisations are unwilling or unable to implement an outcomes measurement system, senior staff and trustees should consider the extent to which organisational culture may be affecting this.

Background and scope

Homeless Link, the national umbrella organisation for frontline homelessness agencies, provides a range of infrastructure support services to agencies working with homeless and vulnerable people, including direct capacity building activity with organisations around quality and evaluation. In the last year, this has included a range of seminars on outcomes approaches, training courses on the Outcomes Star¹, and the development of web resources.

In April 2007, the Performance Hub commissioned Homeless Link to investigate how third sector housing and homelessness organisations had embedded outcomes monitoring systems. This research was designed to complement two other research projects: “*Banking on Outcomes: are shared indicators possible, useful, feasible?*” (New Economics Foundation, commissioned by the Performance Hub) and “*Monitoring and Evaluation Practice*” (Charities Evaluation Service). We were also fortunate to have access to a draft copy of “*A Practical Guide to Outcome Tools*” by Joy McKeith and Kate Graham for the London Housing Foundation.

Outcomes in the third sector

- The Charity Commission’s “*Hallmarks of an Effective Charity*”² defines an outcome as “*the changes, benefits, learning or other effects that happen as a result of the charity’s services or activities*”.
- A number of programmes exist to support third sector organisations with outcomes. Charities Evaluation Services (CES) launched the National Outcomes Programme in 2003, as a response to the growing need for voluntary and community organisations to adopt an outcomes approach in the way they plan, monitor and deliver their services.
- The use of outcomes measurement is becoming increasingly common across the housing and homelessness sector³. In 2001, the London Housing Foundation launched the IMPACT programme, an eight-year initiative to improve the capacity of agencies to deliver well targeted, effective and sustainable services to their homeless and formerly homeless clients. As a major funder of both monitoring and evaluation pilots and specific innovations in service delivery across London, the London Housing Foundation’s programme had significant impact across the homelessness sector.

¹ The Outcomes Star is a paper-based system of measuring distance travelled on ten indicators for use in one-to-one sessions with clients over a period of time.

² <http://www.charitycommission.gov.uk/publications/cc60.asp>

³ The Homeless Outcomes website states “Outcomes are the effects of your activities; the changes, benefits or learning that occurs as a result of the work you carry out. They are changes over time: something that is noticeably different for a person or target group, after a week or six months. For most homelessness organisations, outcomes will describe a change in their service users, for example, noticeably improved independent living skills, addressing substance misuse or stabilising mental health.”

Purpose of the research

This research explores the lessons learned by housing and homelessness organisations implementing an outcomes approach, some of the factors preventing the implementation, and the reasons behind variances in the implementation. It concentrates on the internal and external drivers for the adoption of an outcome monitoring approach by looking at how indicators are chosen; the implementation and review process within organisations; and whether organisations feed back into policy-making processes following implementation. It also explores how funders have affected the process.

Methodology

A series of 15 semi-structured interviews were held under the headings:

- Drivers for adoption of an outcome monitoring approach
- Making the decision
- Lessons from Implementation
- Standardisation and flexibility
- External implementation and dissemination
- Feeding in to policy

Further information on the types of questions asked, assumptions made and organisations involved can be found in Annex 2.

Context: Homelessness, organisational culture and the funding environment

What is homelessness?

People who are homeless are part of a much wider group with acute housing needs, including those living in overcrowded, insecure or unfit homes⁴. There is a loose consensus amongst organisations working with this client group that homelessness is a symptom of inter-personal issues, and that providing accommodation alone is rarely sufficient.

Client support needs

People who are homeless have a range of support needs which vary from individual to individual. Some people experiencing homelessness need no more than suitable accommodation. However, organisations report that between 30% and 80% of the clients they work with have more than one of the following support needs:

- mental health problems
- misuse of various substances
- personality disorders
- offending behaviour
- borderline learning difficulties
- disability
- physical health problems
- challenging behaviours
- age-related vulnerability

Those with complex and multiple needs account for 58%⁵ of those accessing homelessness services across the country.

A range of risk factors makes homelessness more likely. A limited amount of independent research has ascertained the links between risk factors and resultant support needs, but the evidence base is poor. Risk factors include a client:

- being in care as a child or having a disturbed childhood
- having a mental illness or addiction
- having been in the armed forces
- having spent time in prison
- being black or from another minority ethnic community
- having migrated to this country from Eastern or Central Europe or arrived as an asylum seeker

⁴ For more information on homelessness, see Annex I.

⁵ Multiple Needs – A Good Practice briefing. Bevin and van Doorn 2002: Homeless Link

The complexity of client needs and the diversity within the client group, present some major challenges for monitoring and evaluating the work undertaken by agencies. For example, a client who has been an entrenched rough sleeper with poly-drug use and an ingrained reluctance to engage with services, and an 18-year old client in need of little more than encouragement and accommodation to move towards a sustained independent existence, would be hard to compare in terms of distance travelled.

Assessing progress made

Christian Alliance Housing Association is a national charitable organisation with 37 projects across the country providing supported accommodation and resettlement services for homeless people and those at risk of homelessness.

Paul Hopkins is project manager for two hostels in Southampton. He wants to implement an outcomes measurement system across the organisation's range of services to assess clients' progress.

Paul feels that indicators such as 'numbers of people using services' and 'clients moved into private accommodation', which are collated as demanded by funders, do not adequately reflect the scope of the work of the organisation and the personal progress made by clients through using the services.

He feels that while progress for some clients might be deemed to be a move into long-term accommodation or a sustained tenancy, for a large number of clients progress is not necessarily so tangible or quantifiable. For example, progress for a client with a history of chronic alcoholism or substance misuse might be regular engagement with a service, gradual changes in attitude and confidence, or a reduction or management of their substance use. Paul thinks it is important to be able to capture such changes in order to demonstrate the value of their services to funders and other local agencies.

The diversity of organisational culture across the housing and homelessness sector has even greater influence over how organisations work, and the way they intellectually frame the work they do with clients, leading to fundamental issues in terms of monitoring and evaluation.

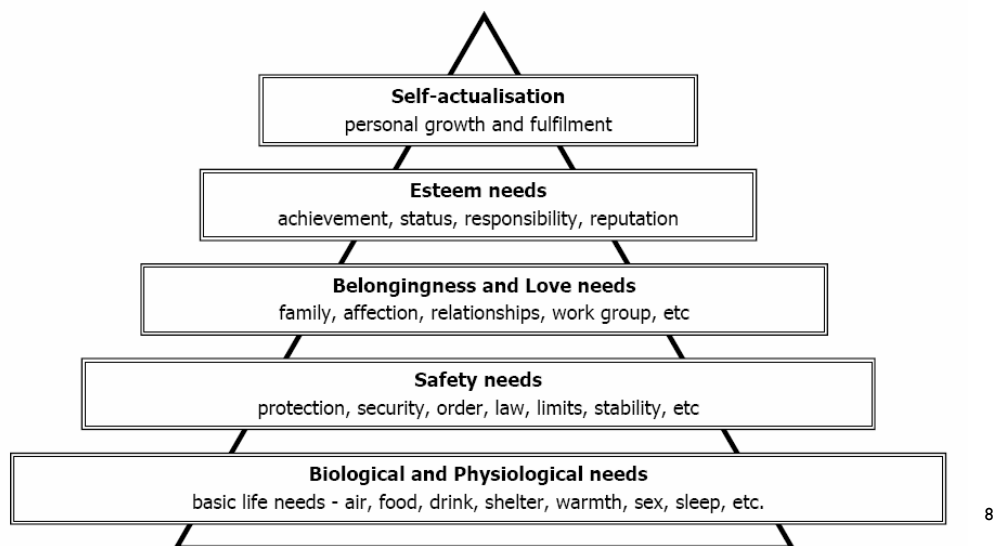
Organisational culture

Research into homelessness agencies undertaken by Johnsen, Cloke and May (2002)⁶ identified the three most common organisational cultures as:

- acceptance (17% of services surveyed);
- rehabilitation and change (13%); and,
- empowerment and resource (35%).

Working culture underpins all the decisions an organisation makes on how to work with clients, and what they want this work to achieve. This, in turn, has a significant effect on monitoring and evaluation, particularly on the measurement of outcomes for clients.

The three different organisational cultures can be understood in relation to Maslow's hierarchy of human requirements for living a successful and meaningful life⁷. People experiencing homelessness, who have complex and multiple needs, may require support at any stage of Maslow's hierarchy.



Cultures of acceptance

Organisations working with a 'containment and acceptance' ethos rarely place any expectation of change on the client. Services based on this model are often faith-based or entirely volunteer-led, with client engagement either paternalistic or respectful. There is often no structured or documented exploration of the client's

⁶ Johnsen, S, Cloke, P and May, J (2002) *Homeless Places Project. Direct Access Hostel and Night Shelter Survey. Summary of Findings*. University of Bristol and Queen Mary, University of London.

⁷ Maslow, A (1943) *A Theory of Human Motivation* Psychology Review 50 370 - 396

⁸ © Alan Chapman 2001-07. Based on [Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs](#). Used with permission from the free resources website www.businessballs.com. Not to be sold or published.

case and support needs, resulting in a lack of analysable data. Services focus on delivering support to people at the physiological and safety stages of Maslow's hierarchy - for example soup runs - although faith-based services may state they provide support at every stage of the hierarchy, including the self-actualisation phase, through love, containment, acceptance and spiritual support.

Commonly services with this overriding ethos do not accept statutory funding, believing it will take away their independent voice, nor do they seek local government contracts to support their work, as such contracts would bind them to certain monitoring and evaluation requirements. Clients are often consulted and involved in service delivery, influencing a range of practical factors such as opening times and food served, but it is unlikely that clients will fundamentally influence organisational culture.

Organisations operating with a containment and acceptance ethos are often unwilling and unable to use outcome monitoring systems to measure client progress.

Cultures of rehabilitation and change

Services based on a 'rehabilitation and change' ethos focus on the physiological and safety elements of Maslow's need hierarchy, and deliver services including provision of accommodation, and client advocacy to support them in accessing other services. They concentrate on helping the individual to navigate the system they find themselves in, rather than focussing on their potential or individuality. Clients are consulted and involved in some aspects of the way a service is delivered, but may have very little influence on most aspects of service delivery. It is likely that consultation and involvement may be limited to client questionnaires, surveys and complaints procedures. These kinds of agencies do not give an individually tailored service; therefore systems can be used across client groups and individuals to ensure consistency.

Organisations with a rehabilitation and change approach can usually monitor and evaluate on a standardised basis, and are often willing and able to pick up existing systems and adapt them as required. There is evidence of a willingness to change monitoring and evaluation practice to fit contractual requirements. Organisations with this ethos thrive in the current contract-based funding environment.

Cultures of empowerment and resource

An organisation with an 'empowerment and resource' ethos focuses on the potential of the client to grow and develop in line with their own aspirations, skills and ability to change. This model is becoming increasingly popular across the voluntary homelessness sector and has been discussed in a number of research papers, books, conferences and online resources, including the highly influential '*Steadying the Ladder: Social and Emotional Aspirations of Homeless People*'⁹. It is also a fundamental and articulated part of central government policy, driven primarily through a £90 million capital improvement programme aimed at changing the face of hostel provision.

⁹ Gerard Lemos (2006) *Steadying the Ladder: Social and Emotional Aspirations of Homeless People* Lemos & Crane

Organisations with this approach aim to provide services to support their clients at all five stages of Maslow's needs hierarchy, although there is some debate as to whether any of them actually achieve this in a systematic and universal way. Client involvement is likely to be significantly more influential, with clients often designing the specification of services to be delivered. Indeed, client-led organisations, such as Manchester's Service User Network for Homeless People and Brent Homeless Users Group (B.HUG) are increasingly common. Originally a project within Homeless Link, Groundswell is a client-led organisation dedicated to peer research, taking client involvement to the next level. Groundswell is frequently employed by service commissioners to provide insight into the needs and requirements of existing and potential clients.

Organisations with an empowerment and resource ethos are likely to require a much greater amount of tailored support to design outcome indicators to assess progress with the diverse work they undertake with clients.

The funding environment

Homelessness organisations are reliant on a complex mix of funding streams, most of which have their own reporting requirements. Funding streams include:

- Supporting People
- Statutory sector contracts e.g. with the local Primary Care Trust or Job Centre Plus
- Rent (usually housing benefit or direct payment from local authorities)
- Charitable income from trusts and foundations
- Charitable income from direct donations from the public
- Self-generated income through training and consultancy

Funding streams vary in purpose and implementation. There can even be wide variation in monitoring and evaluation arrangements for national programmes such as Supporting People as they are interpreted and implemented at the local authority level. The implications for planning, monitoring and evaluating services can be significant. For example, although Supporting People concentrates on 'housing related support' in some localities it may be used for education, training and employment related activity, while in others this activity falls outside the definition and therefore the remit of work to be funded by this stream.¹⁰ Some funders allow the organisations they fund to set their own outcomes, whilst others (such as Supporting People) retain control over the outcomes that are measured.

¹⁰ For a full exploration of Supporting People, including more information on monitoring, evaluation and data aggregation, please see Annex I

Examples of monitoring and evaluation within funding streams

- European Social Fund monies can be spent in a variety of ways, and monitoring and evaluation systems vary, dependent on the co-financing or channelling body. Hard outputs, rather than distance travelled outcomes for clients, are often monitored. Off the Streets and into Work (OSW) channel this type of funding for homelessness organisations and have designed an outcomes measurement tool to monitor distance travelled for clients as well as the hard output based data.
- Learning and Skills Council funding, a co-financing income stream alongside European Social Fund monies, is accessed by homelessness organisations to fund learning and skills activities for clients. Monitoring and evaluation requirements focus on outputs and indicators rather than outcomes, making contract outputs difficult to reach. Clients furthest from the labour market (and therefore likely to be picked up by homelessness agencies) are often unlikely to achieve indicators such as qualifications or paid employment.
- Job Centre Plus (JCP) has moved from output-evaluated funding to outcomes-evaluated funding for work undertaken by homelessness organisations in assisting clients back to the labour market. JCP will now fund projects monitoring spend on a distance travelled model, which has proved helpful for service providers working with clients furthest from the labour market.
- In the capital, London Councils (the association of local authorities in London) funds education, training and employment activity, and provides core funding for a number of homelessness agencies, alongside other third sector organisations. They have been monitoring the effect of their work on an outcomes basis for the past five years, but as each organisation is able to set their own outcomes, there is no systematic way of aggregating monitoring data and measuring the effectiveness of the whole funding stream becomes problematic.

Meeting a range of reporting requirements associated with different funding sources can be challenging, and it can be difficult in such situations to assess overall effectiveness. If an organisation has a high level of diversity within its service provision (for example, education, training and employment activity, provision of housing, provision of housing related support) the range of monitoring requirements across the organisation can be complex.

In London in 2004 a number of organisations delivering education, training and employment activities went out of business following changes to European funding requirements. Whilst larger organisations were able to subsidise this form of activity, smaller organisations were not. This created some risk aversion within housing and homelessness organisations, which is heightened by what is seen as complex and over-burdensome administrative requirements.

All funding streams are under increasing pressure to prove their value to the Treasury. Supporting People costs are approximately double initial estimates and therefore prime for cuts in competition with other government priorities such as health and education. Whilst local and regional outcomes measurement pilots assist in showing the value of Supporting People at the local level, central government will require aggregated monitoring data to assess the overall value of this funding stream.

However, outcome data from a varied client group with diverse needs can be difficult to aggregate:

“When we first came across outcomes measurement systems in the States, the understanding was that effective systems there were top-down in approach. I didn’t think this would work well in the UK. As previous analysis undertaken by the NHS had shown, the system would need to be effective at four levels: between the client and frontline worker, across teams within an organisation, across organisations, and finally across a funding stream. I think the current outcomes measurement systems in use within agencies do have value at the lower three levels – getting the right data to aggregate across Supporting People will be the challenge.”

Kevin Ireland, Director, London Housing Foundation

Commonly used outcomes measurement systems

Depending on client location and support needs, housing and homelessness organisations offer a range of services including housing, safe-spaces such as day centres, housing related support, and activities assisting independent living such as education, training and employment services.

Whilst the offering of accommodation lends itself well to traditional output based monitoring and evaluation, housing related support and activities designed to promote independence are better suited to outcomes monitoring on a distance travelled model:

“Outcomes measurement is dependent on the type of service being offered, and the client group with which you are working. For example, let’s say change is measured on a 10 point scale, where 1 represents complete lack of ability to undertake the task or area of competence, and 10 represents no support needs in this area. If you are a street outreach team, engaging with entrenched rough sleepers with complex and multiple needs, you are only likely to be able to measure change between numbers 1 and 2. A day centre working with clients who will engage with services, but who are still rough sleeping and unable to cope with living in a hostel environment, you are likely to be able to measure change between numbers 1 and 4. A short stay hostel may be measuring change between numbers 3 and 8. A resettlement team may be measuring change between numbers 5 and 8. It all depends on how your organisation chooses to implement the model, and what you agree internally are the right definitions for the levels of change you measure. It’s also likely to be much harder to get someone from stages 1 to 4, say than from 9

to 10, as once a client is engaged on the journey of change, they will gather momentum.”

Triangle Consulting

The experiences of the organisations Homeless Link work with echo the need for flexibility around distance travelled measures. There is a key distinction here in the underpinning ethos of different outcomes measurement systems.

“When we were first designing the IMPACT programme, there was a great deal of debate about the basis of the outcomes system we would decide to promote through long term funding. It was felt by the majority of those I consulted that a didactic, top-down approach was not going to work for the diversity of organisations and clients that we wanted to work with... For outcome management to be useful, it is essential for service providers themselves to develop outcomes appropriate to their clients and their aims. They need to do so over time and through consultation, rather than either wait for funders to determine them or use an off-the-shelf tool that is inappropriate.”

Kevin Ireland, Director, London Housing Foundation

This does, however, create issues for organisations that wish to design and implement systems which meet their organisational aims, yet work within different funding streams, each with their own, distinct monitoring and evaluation frameworks. Organisations wishing to assess the distance travelled by their clients may want to design systems tailored to their own internal practices, but might need to work to prescribed outcomes for other funding streams.

A range of outcomes measurement systems is available to help housing and homelessness organisations monitor changes or progress for individual clients. No one system has been accepted nationally for adoption on a distance travelled model for clients, but the systems developed and tested across a range of organisations and in widespread use include:

The Employability Map

- OSW's soft outcomes tool, which encourages clients and support workers to plot progress towards work and further training
- Designed by Triangle Consulting
- Will be independently evaluated in 2007
- Currently in use across 54 organisations including those not funded by OSW
- Refined across a range of organisations and has potential for adoption outside homeless sector
- Embedded within support planning processes within organisations implementing the map
- Funded through ESF, meaning there are a range of additional data gathering requirements
- Works well for organisations working with clients who are close to re-entering the labour market but may be less useful for organisations working with clients with more complex needs, regardless of organisational size

Developing the Employability Map

“We were really keen to develop a system which showed how clients progressed, and to design a system from which we could aggregate information. This helps us make a powerful argument to our funders... we worked very closely with our partners to develop TEM, especially around the design of the system. We were also keen to test and refine it with clients, so we piloted the system with different organisations and over 100 clients. It has now been adopted by over 50 organisations and feedback has been really positive. We invested in a lot of training though to make sure agencies really understood the benefit of outcomes measurement. We wanted to have certainty that TEM was going to be used with clients in an empowering way, and included coaching techniques for frontline workers in the training.”

Ima Miah, Project Manager at OSW

Outcomes Star

- A very popular soft outcomes model, piloted by St. Mungos with Triangle Consulting and since used or adapted by other providers, including Single Homeless Project (SHP), and now being promoted by the London Housing Foundation
- There are ten outcomes areas
- Successfully adopted by a range of organisations across the sector and can be used easily by large and small organisations
- Not independently evaluated
- Variations have been developed for women’s refuges, projects for young parents and projects for young people
- Triangle Consulting are currently working with the Mental Health Providers Forum to develop a version tailored to the needs of mental health projects

SOUL (Soft Outcomes Universal Learning) record

- A learner centred soft outcomes evaluation tool, measured against the five key areas of Every Child Matters
- Developed by The Research Centre, City College Norwich and providers across Norfolk, it is in use across the third sector in Norfolk
- Not independently evaluated
- Good potential for this system to be used more widely as it has been developed across a number of organisations
- Works where organisations are delivering learning and skills activity but not clear whether it would be suitable for smaller organisations

In addition, local pilots of Supporting People have led to the development of new systems, or the adaptation of existing systems used by social services, Connexions or other statutory sources. The two systems identified and examined in this piece of research were:

The Rochdale Client Centre Dial

- 10 outcome domains¹¹ against which three assessments are made
- Developed by Rochdale SP and local providers and to be used across a range of services
- Not independently evaluated
- Adopted by large and small organisations

Regional Outcomes System for Yorkshire and the Humber (ROYSH)

- 14 outcome domains against which three assessments are made
- Developed by Sheffield Supporting People and local providers and now being rolled out across the Yorkshire and Humber region
- Not independently evaluated
- Adopted by large and small organisations

There are also a number of internal systems designed by specific organisations, which are less evaluated and of limited use without further testing and evaluation. Due to the prevalence of a bottom-up approach to designing outcomes measurement systems to meet an organisation's needs, there are probably as many systems as there are adopting organisations. Three reviewed as part of this research included:

I Can

- Broadway's adult education model, which helps clients to build an individual learning plan, used exclusively in the learning and skills team
- Not independently evaluated and currently only in use within the organisation
- Some potential for use across other organisations

You Can

- Broadway's standard outcomes model, used within accommodation-based and street-based services
- Not independently evaluated and currently only in use within the organisation
- Some potential for use across other organisations

The evaluation tree

- Streetwise Opera's evaluation model for arts and culture work with clients with complex needs

External evaluation of many of the systems available is not common. Other parts of the third sector where outcomes measurement is more ubiquitous have adopted a more rigorous approach to external evaluation of the systems used: Oxfam commissioned a meta-analysis of 60 external evaluations of their service delivery (based on outcomes data from projects across the UK) in 2006. No such scrutiny has been undertaken within the homelessness sector, probably because the use of outcomes measurement systems is still in the early adoption phase.

¹¹ An outcome domain is an area where measurable progress can be made – for example, offending behaviour and substance misuse are two common outcome domains.

Indicator banks

There is some interest in identifying a set of common outcome indicators for common assessment areas in the housing and homelessness sector such as improvements or changes in:

- personal responsibility
- living skills
- social networking
- substance risk
- physical and mental health
- self-esteem/confidence
- employability/education
- accommodation/housing status
- personal finances
- alcohol or substance misuse
- offending
- meaningful occupation
- independent travel

At time of writing, however, no such indicator bank has been developed, probably because each outcomes measurement system reviews a different area of support requirement.

To be accepted as valid, any common indicator bank would have to be based on standardised assessment processes across a variety of funding streams which, at present, each have their own indicators. It would also need to address concerns that such a resource might lead to comparative assessment, deterring organisations from working with the most vulnerable and chaotic clients who might need the most support, yet show the least distance travelled.

A further potential barrier is the heavy reliance by the sector on Supporting People funding, which has recently developed a set of outcome indicators to be assessed and aggregated nationally. These indicators were purposefully set as high-level indicators, beneath which organisations could implement their own distance travelled measures. Any indicator bank would have to complement this, and would be subject to substantial change when Supporting People funding is mainstreamed into Local Area Agreements in 2009.

These concerns could be overcome if there were sufficient interest from the sector for a national infrastructure organisation, such as Homeless Link, which understands the issues and measurement challenges, to write and update a good set of indicators. Further research is required to assess whether there is a high level of interest. At the time of writing, research being undertaken by New Economics Foundation (nef) has not been finalised.

Analysis of research findings

Drivers for adoption of an outcome monitoring approach

External drivers

For organisations majority funded by Supporting People, national changes in policy and the sector's move towards outcomes measurement have been major drivers in the adoption of these systems.

The national Supporting People team at the department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) released a national outcomes framework in July 2007. The framework contains a set of high-level indicators, focusing on the end results for clients leaving a service. Although no common set of outcome indicators has been adopted at local level, Supporting People teams around the country have undertaken their own local pilot projects to examine the value of outcomes measurement. This piloting has involved organisations they fund in the design of local indicator banks and distance travelled measurement systems.

Providing early influence

Broadacres Housing Association is a medium-sized registered social landlord working in Yorkshire, providing a range of services including housing and housing related support. A director of Broadacres became aware of a regional pilot programme across Yorkshire and the Humber led by the Sheffield Supporting People team. This pilot, four months in progress when Broadacres joined, used an outcomes measurement system to show distance travelled for clients.

“It became really clear to us that outcomes measurement was a real change in the strategic environment... We deliver a range of Supporting People funded services, and we knew that if this pilot was successful, then we would have to adopt this system anyway. We really wanted to be involved in order to influence the end system, and make sure it met the needs of our organisation and client groups.”

Val Neasham, Quality Improvement Manager

There is still more work to be done to finalise the national outcomes framework for Supporting People, and there is likely to be a call for some standardisation in indicators used across the country to allow aggregation of data at a national level. However, at present the push for centralised data collection lacks focus as local commissioners are developing their own systems.

Philip Howson, Housing Independence Commissioning Manager at Sheffield City Council, led the development of the Regional Outcomes System for Yorkshire and the Humber (ROSYH):

“From our perspective, we decided to start the pilot because we saw the real value and benefit in commissioning terms to measure the outcomes of service delivery. Whilst central government have developed the national framework, we have been able to iron out all the implementation issues prior to this becoming a national requirement. We will tweak the system to ensure that services can use ROSYH to provide data for the national Supporting People team... but it’s not central government’s role to tell local authorities how to commission and evaluate local services.”

Local implementation by Supporting People teams has been sporadic, with some expressing concern about launching pilots that may not be compatible with the CLG framework. Newcastle Supporting People team has regular forums with providers which they have used to help determine a range of outcomes that they would like to measure, but will not implement a formal pilot until they are clear about the CLG strategy.

There is evidence that organisations funded by Supporting People have been keen to influence the commissioning teams during the pilot phase, in many cases because they believe they have a better understanding of outcomes than Supporting People teams, as a homelessness agency in the north of England commented:

“We had a look at what the Supporting People team were proposing as an outcomes framework and were quite concerned. The draft framework was lengthy, complex, would be difficult to administer and actually confused outputs and outcomes for clients... it was a real mess. Because we’d implemented the Outcomes Star a couple of years ago, and had learnt a lot from the process, we wanted to take part in the pilot to try and change it, and show them what outcomes actually are for our clients.”

Other funding streams and commissioning organisations have also pushed the adoption of an outcomes monitoring approach. Whilst it is very positive that many more organisations are now measuring outcomes for clients, the drive from commissioners to lead on this process (particularly where they pre-set outcomes) has meant that there is now little opportunity for organisations to devise their own systems from the bottom up. To do this they would either have to run two systems alongside each other or find a way of integrating funder requirements within their own internal systems, which may prove particularly problematic for smaller organisations. The ubiquity of outcomes measurement systems does mean that there is now a constant cycle of refinement and improvement, which may overcome this in the future.

Internal drivers

The two internal drivers most commonly cited for the adoption of an outcomes approach were: as a way of assisting frontline workers to see the value of their work; and the influence of best practice on senior managers.

For frontline workers, delivering services with a client group that exhibits complex and multiple needs can be a somewhat frustrating process. The burnout level for

staff working in the sector for less than five years is 40%, and over 60% for staff in the sector for over five years¹². This stems from a difficulty in maintaining motivation when a high number of clients either refuse to engage with services or drop out without reaching an agreed indicator of success, such as sustaining an independent tenancy or paid employment. Outcomes measurement systems focusing on the distance travelled for this client group provide a valuable way of showing progress for clients, even if it is slow or uneven.

Measuring the difference made

Cardboard Citizens is a small arts organisation working with clients accessing other homelessness services, such as hostels. They aim to improve the confidence and self-esteem of their clients through drama workshops.

“We adopted our current outcomes measurement system for a variety of reasons really. The creative staff felt slightly frustrated by the fact they couldn’t measure the impact of the work they were doing. It’s obvious there’s a change in a client taking place. For example, when someone comes into a workshop they may be shy and have problems communicating – when they leave, there’s a real spring in their step, you can see that you’ve made a difference in terms of that person’s confidence. We wanted to be able to measure that, and show the value of the work we are doing – both to ourselves and funders.”

Clara Clint, Programme Director

Working towards meaningful occupation

The Society of St James provides accommodation with care and support to homeless and vulnerably housed people in Southampton. Every year the Society houses over 500 people through its various accommodation projects, and helps over 3,000 through its soup kitchen and support services.

The Society wanted to increase levels of involvement in meaningful occupation by clients in their supported housing projects, and wanted to extend the existing range of activities to suit clients’ needs and preferences. They ran a pilot project with 30 clients each having a semi-structured hour long consultation with a trained advisor to discuss issues around health, education, employment and general aspirations which would help to inform a subsequent programme of meaningful occupation.

Continued...

¹² Seal, M (2006) *Understanding and responding to homeless experiences, identities and cultures* Russell House: Devon

The consultation sessions were intended to involve clients in developing their own outcomes by exploring not just the types of activities that they wanted to take part in, but how they might help them to reach longer-term goals such as attaining qualifications and skills or sustained employment.

The response to the pilot project was generally very positive from both support workers and clients, with one client saying “the project has helped me get my life back on track and get the qualifications I need to get back into work.” Clients also reported that the project had a positive impact on their self-confidence and gave them a useful opportunity to consider their options for the future.

The vast majority of clients involved in the pilot project engaged with one or more meaningful activity as a direct result of the project, and more than half engaged with two or more activities. Since the original pilot, the project has been extended to more than fifty other residents in supported housing projects.

Some models, such as the Outcomes Star, provide a visual indicator of client development. The system can be used as a basis for structuring key-working sessions with clients and was designed to be used as an empowerment tool where clients and workers jointly negotiate a score at the initial support needs assessment session. Subsequent sessions undertaken over a period of time show distance travelled and changes in the client.

The work that managers do to locate best practice has also driven organisations to adopt outcomes measurement. Management thinking is shaped through attendance at training courses, at conferences, and through reading briefing papers such as “Managing outcomes: a guide for homelessness organisations”. The London Housing Foundation’s IMPACT programme has been very influential, and the experience of organisations like St. Mungos that have adopted the Outcomes Star has informed practice. Infrastructure organisations, including Homeless Link and SITRA, have also promoted the use of outcomes measurement to managers within the sector as best practice, although no distinction is made between the use of different models.

Sharing learning

The Single Homeless Project (SHP) is a London based charity providing a range of housing and support services across the capital.

SHP was inspired to adopt an outcomes model by St. Mungos experience with the Outcomes Star, as the service outcomes the Star measures closely matched those that SHP sought to deliver. The popularity of the Star model among other similar organisations was also a prompt, as SHP is a member of a London based benchmarking group that actively shares good practice and performance information.

Developing a common outcomes management system

National Children's Homes (NCH) is the leading UK provider of family community centres, children's services in rural areas, services for disabled children and their families, and services for young people leaving care.

Lesley Foster, project manager of a supported housing project in Rochdale for young women aged 16-21 who have a housing need and are pregnant or have a young child, has led on NCH's outcomes development and implementation in the region. After seeing a presentation on the Outcomes Star model as implemented by St. Mungos, Lesley sought to adapt assessments and support plans for her project to make them more outcomes focused. To build on this process she approached Rochdale Supporting People and a number of other local agencies about the possibility of developing a common outcomes management system. Rochdale Supporting People agreed to fund a pilot project and employed Triangle Consulting to assist the planning and development of the project. This model became the Rochdale Client Dial, and has now been implemented in services across the local authority area after an extensive piloting phase.

Issues constraining organisations from adopting an outcomes approach

Organisations providing a diverse range of services often feel that a 'one size fits all' model intended for use across the whole organisation will be unsuitable. A successful outcome for a client in one service might be a change in attitude or improved sociability, but for another it might be a sustained change in housing or employment status, and it is difficult to judge these changes on the same scale.

For some organisations, the implementation of an outcomes measuring system can seem like an unnecessary additional layer of administration in a sector that they already see as being over-regulated. Providers of supported housing, for example, are already required to provide regular output and outcome performance data to their local Supporting People team, the local authority housing department, and the Housing Corporation, and could be subject to an Audit Commission inspection. This situation is compounded for organisations working over a number of local authority boundaries with different reporting requirements, or in two-tier authority areas.

"The stats we have to produce change from quarter to quarter, so it's quite hard to maintain a standard way of monitoring and evaluating work done in the hostel over a period of time... I'm sent requests for information from my area manager all the time, I'm also asked to provide information for monitoring to our head office in another part of the country... I'd love to implement an outcomes system, because I've heard about the benefits of measuring outcomes for clients at a couple of seminars and think it sounds like a great idea – useful for clients and staff. But I don't feel that imposing another paper-based system on top of what staff already have to produce in terms of management information is going to be possible,

without dropping some of the other monitoring requirements we have – something my area manager tells me is not possible.”

Hostel Manager, large housing organisation, South West England

Organisations with specific staff to undertake performance management and service improvement, and with solid information technology capacity, have been able to meet these complex needs.

“We have a regular monthly meeting of quality and performance management staff from organisations across London to benchmark performance and undertake peer learning. There is no sense from the group that complex monitoring arrangements are damaging organisation’s abilities to respond to innovations in evaluation.”

Quality Manager, London-based homelessness organisation

This point poses the issue of scale. Organisations large enough to employ specialist staff are usually those with more than 100 employees. Analysis suggests that organisations that operate over several funder or location boundaries, yet without specialist performance management or quality staff, will find it more difficult to implement an outcomes approach than either small organisations with one funder, or large organisations with the benefit of scale. Organisations engaging with Supporting People pilots have not gained additional funding for monitoring and evaluation purposes; this creates limits on the capacity of small organisations to engage in indicator design.

“We would have liked to have taken part in the pilot but we just didn’t have the resources to engage. There are only three full time paid members of staff here, and if any of us take time away from the project, it limits the numbers of sessions we can provide for clients. We’d have to shut the advice centre for the three of us to attend a meeting, and that’s not possible.”

Director, small homelessness agency, East of England

A major concern for small organisations hesitant at introducing an outcomes measurement system is that the financial cost and commitment of other resources can be prohibitive. Costs incurred can include consultancy, training, and development of computerised systems.

“We commissioned a consultant to produce an outcomes measurement system that we could implement without significant staff training requirements. It cost over £2,000 in consultancy fees, and for an organisation with a turnover of less than £100,000 a year, that’s a real investment. I can see how it would put other organisations off...”

Manager, small homelessness agency, London

Although this has been allayed by the approach of some funders:

“We realised that it was important to make sure that staff of the providers involved should be supported and trained to use the Dial effectively, so we developed a guide for key workers, a supporting manual and a training course.”

Colette Benton, Rochdale Supporting People

Some smaller organisations also stated that they were disinclined to adopt what they saw as the overburdening demands of some funder imposed systems.

“We are really keen to monitor and evaluate the benefits of our work... These things take time, and I’m the only member of staff – part time at that! But our organisation is based on love and respect for service users – our volunteers are selected on the basis of ability to provide that. Our volunteers don’t have any capacity for paperwork really unless it’s necessary. We don’t get any statutory funding, and even if we did, I’m not sure the changes that kind of funding might make would be welcomed – by trustees, volunteers or service users. Outcomes measurement seems to involve asking a lot of very personal questions – people don’t come here for that.”

Manager, church-based day centre

It is possible, but not probable, that training and other capacity building activity may address misgivings about outcomes measurement that are rooted in organisational culture.

In conclusion

The adoption of an outcomes approach is to an extent driven by funders, but there are also a range of internal drivers which create worth in adopting an outcomes approach. These include benefits for clients and frontline workers in adopting a structured approach to key-working, and a drive for best practice and excellence from middle and senior managers, although this is less likely to be the case in those organisations with a culture of containment and acceptance. We believe that organisations that embrace the concept of moving people forward to independence can benefit a great deal from adopting an outcomes measurement system.

Deciding which system to use

For service providers, the process of deciding which system to use is not as linear as assumed at the start of this research. The organisations we spoke to rarely undertook comparative assessments of potential models, or a detailed forecasting of how they would implement a new system. Instead, the decision making process was more usually linked with funder requirements, significant interest from a member of the senior management team, or strong interest from the staff team. These factors usually determined which system was adopted.

In contrast, funders do adopt a systematic approach.

“We considered a range of outcomes measurement systems, and looked at different types of system. Essentially we were looking for a distance travelled model, which had been tested elsewhere. We narrowed the selection process down to two, the Edinburgh Common Homeless Outcomes model, and the Bromford Housing model. Neither were exactly what we wanted – neither had all of the outcome domains we were looking for, and we felt the scoring systems didn’t quite match our requirements either. So we decided to take elements from both, and design our own system in partnership with our providers.”

Philip Howson, Supporting People Sheffield

Over complexity of systems can be off-putting for staff and clients. Extensive systems can have resistance at implementation point and are perceived as time consuming.

“When we went back to review the Individual Progression System (our previous monitoring and evaluation tool) we had quite a lot of feedback that the paper-based tools were too long, and that trying to get all of that information done within a key-working session was not achievable... lots of the information people had to ask as well was dependent on the worker having a good enough relationship with the client, as it was quite personal.”

Ima Miah, Project Manager, OSW

“One of the reasons our initial attempt at monitoring distance travelled for clients had not been successful was due to the system we had tried to implement. We had an external party come and design a system for us – but it was really complicated, pages and pages, and the information gathered was extensive – but we didn’t use half of it. It wasn’t possible to analyse the information gathered in any meaningful way either because it wasn’t adopted by the whole staff team due to these issues. We are now looking at another outcomes measurement system to complement the one we designed ourselves and expand it slightly...”

Clara Clint, Programme Director, Cardboard Citizens

Client involvement in the decision making process varied, depending upon the reasons for an organisation adopting an outcomes approach.

“We wanted client input at every stage. We kept to the five outcome domains around employability, as the data coming out of the system had to have use at a national level. We designed the indicators and monitoring systems in partnership with the agencies involved. When we got to the piloting phase, we trialled the

system with over 100 clients across 9 agencies, they gave us some really useful feedback, and we refined the system after what they had said.”

Ima Miah, Project Manager, OSW

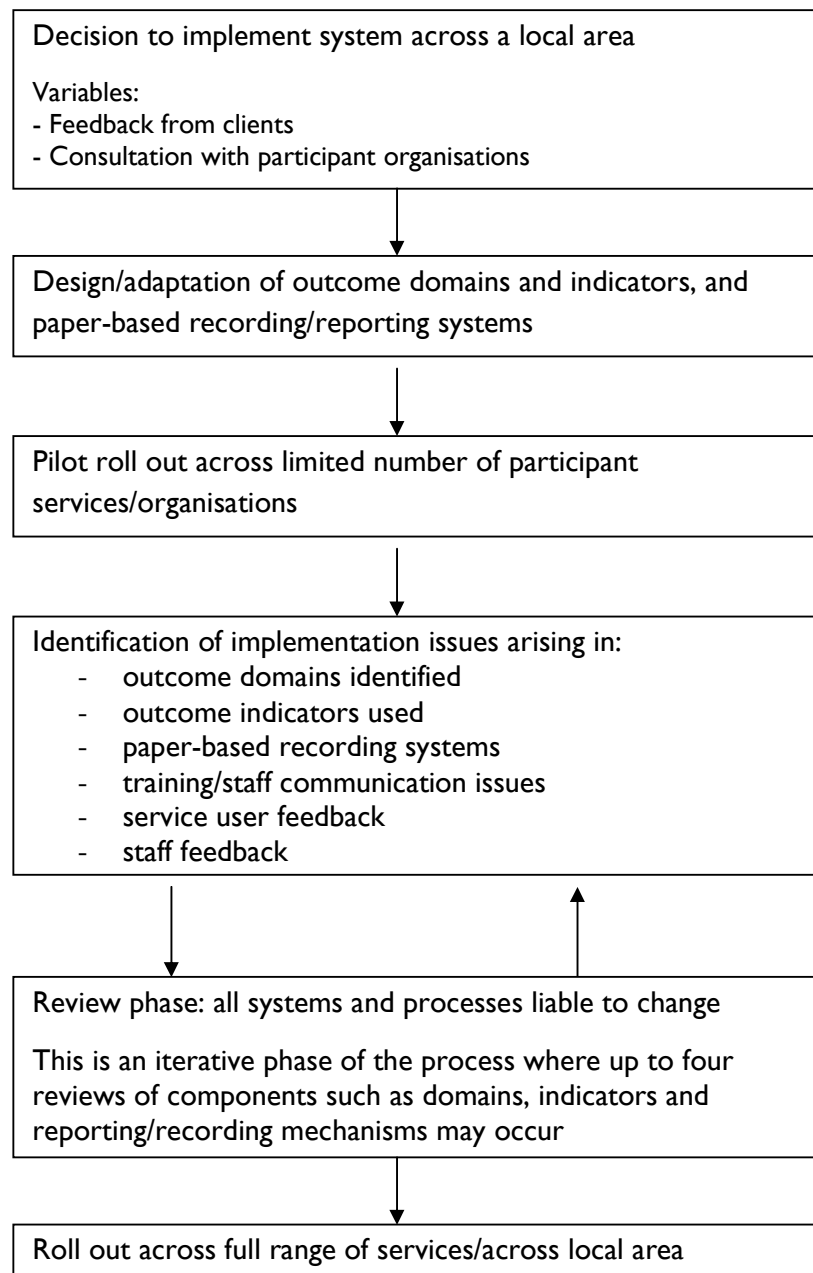
In Conclusion

The decision making process is closely aligned with an organisation’s internal and external drivers for adopting an outcomes approach. We believe that client involvement at the indicator design stage of outcomes measurement systems is of critical importance to the success of the overall approach.

Lessons from implementation

We identified a variety of implementation processes that reflected the thinking behind the adoption of an outcomes approach.

Where organisations were implementing a system intended to produce aggregated data across a local area or funding programme, implementation followed this typical pattern:



Organisations implementing a system that would only be monitored internally underwent a similar implementation process, with less iteration at the review stage prior to roll out.

“It was important to keep testing the model to make sure it was as relevant and easy to use as possible - and this involved getting as much feedback as possible from managers, support staff and service users. People felt like they were a part of the process from start to finish.”

Colette Benton, Rochdale Supporting People

Communication with staff prior to implementation of an outcomes system was viewed as vital to its success. This included preparation through discussion in team meetings, consultation with staff, ‘selling the benefits’ of measuring outcomes to staff, and exploring how it fits with existing practice.

Initial resistance from staff and clients is common and imposing a system without consultation would be likely to exacerbate this problem. In one large homelessness organisation, implementation of an outcomes measurement system has been problematic, as a service manager explained:

“There was a buy in from some of the senior management team, but it wasn’t universal – this then impacted on how well managers sold the benefits of the system to staff, which resulted in patchy roll out in different teams. What has helped more than anything else is that there is a good informal communication network amongst frontline workers, who were in some cases quick to see the benefits of an outcomes measurement approach. It wasn’t communicated officially very well internally though. In hindsight, I think we could have done it a lot better.”

The benefits of positive communication were apparent in Broadacres:

“We prepared the ground pretty thoroughly – staff were informed at team meetings that we were looking at this, and had the chance to discuss it. We then undertook a training programme for staff, showing them the paperwork and talking through how it meant a few changes to the way they already worked. The training got people really enthusiastic... when we came to rolling out and reviewing, it worked to our advantage.”

It can be hard to ensure consistent practice even within teams, and across organisations:

“We rolled out the Outcomes Star a couple of years ago, but there’s still inconsistency within the staff team in terms of how it’s used. That does make it difficult for me to feel that secure in the accuracy of the management reports I produce. Having talked to a manager from another service, it was clear we were using the data in quite different ways... I’m not sure how helpful that can be as a management tool, so we do rely on other indicators for that purpose.”

Hostel Manager

Triangle Consulting have recently undertaken an exercise with St. Mungos, reviewing the use of the Star across their service teams. This data is still under analysis and a briefing will be published in autumn 2007 to share the learning. The aim of this exercise was to assist St. Mungos in using the Star as a management tool. The London Housing Foundation also continues to invest in this area as it is recognised as an aspect of the outcomes approach which organisations have been slow to implement.

“Consistency in how tools are used is important if agencies are to have faith in their data. If practice improves in this area then there won’t be such a split between agencies using tools to improve key-work [sessions] and agencies wanting ‘hard’ data for funding. There is the potential for a tool like the Star to offer both.”

London Housing Foundation

In Conclusion

Implementation appears to follow an iterative process, with major variances around the stage at which clients are consulted (if at all) and the number of times systems are reviewed between the pilot stage and final roll out. One organisation mentioned at least four different iterations of paper-based systems and three revisions of the IT system to support it prior to roll out. We believe that outcomes measurement systems can and do have wider applications than key-working alone, but attention must be paid to standardisation of practice within and across organisations if they are to be successful. Communication within the staff team and with clients is an area we consider essential to the success of the implementation of an outcomes measurement system.

Standardisation and flexibility

“We decided to create the I Can outcomes measurement system, because the things that other teams within the organisation wanted to measure didn’t really fit within a learning context... the framework is broadly the same, but we used a range of different indicators.”

Harriet Cookson, Learning and Skills Manager, Broadway

Indicators (and indeed outcomes measurement systems) varied across most of the organisations involved in this research. Whilst one set of indicators may be needed to measure progress with clients, those with different needs may also require different indicators.

During implementation, Broadacres found that the Supporting People outcomes model was not suitable for older clients as they are not likely to improve in terms of their reliance on services. This could be upsetting for clients if they perceive they are not making the progress that might be expected of them. The outcomes measurement system was therefore only implemented across relevant (short term) services.

The use of standard indicators can be problematic when applied to a range of different services:

“This would be great for hostel staff, or day centres, where you build up contact with a client over a period of time... but it’s no good for my team. I work in street outreach and I might only see a person once or twice. We don’t build a relationship with many of the clients we come into contact with, so something as long and detailed as this isn’t going to be that relevant. There’s no way of knowing how long you’re going to be in contact with someone for, either, and I can’t see my colleagues doing one of these assessments with everyone they come into contact with. Not only that, but it wouldn’t do us any favours in terms of meeting commissioner requirements either – they are looking for hard output based monitoring, not all this soft outcomes stuff.”

Focus group participant

This was a particular issue for street outreach projects, where staff work with entrenched rough sleepers on the street. Many of these clients have significant mental health and other issues which create difficulties in any kind of communication prior to engagement with building based services. These services are often commissioned by local authorities outside of the Supporting People framework, as it is not housing related support. Funding comes from a range of sources, including Drug Action Teams, Primary Care Trusts, Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships and general homelessness budgets.

Standardisation of indicators within organisations comes through training and team meetings:

“It was only once training and implementation had been rolled out across the whole organisation, that the management data coming back to us was useful, in terms of

assessing the performance of different teams. There was a six-month lag between implementation in the pilot teams and full roll out... whilst there may have been some benefits for frontline staff and clients for those six months, it wasn't that useful in terms of managing the organisation and illustrating the outcomes of our work. The same indicators are being used in the same way across all of our hostels now."

Senior Manager

Non-standard use of indicators creates problems at the data aggregation phase as not all services are uniformly monitored:

"What has happened during the pilot phase has made us rethink why exactly we want the information, and what we are going to do with it... it has helped us rethink our use of data. We are now going to review how this helps us compare the support needs of different client groups, and therefore our spend for different groups..."

Supporting People Manager

Quality Controls

Quality controls are dependent on the length of time an individual organisation has been measuring outcomes. In this research, controls in place included regular team meetings to discuss practice, training and retraining for staff throughout the implementation phase (both in terms of how to use the recording systems when working with a client, and in inputting data to any back end IT system), and review of management information if produced.

The ability of IT systems to produce management data across workers and services was in some cases an unexpected benefit of using an outcomes approach:

"The information and management reports that the IT system produced gave us a really useful management tool, for looking at caseload, and to help us assess how good certain workers are at helping individuals to make those changes."

Senior Manager, large housing association

Supervision sessions and team meetings were used to ensure consistency and accuracy of information:

"We used team meetings to talk through how staff were using the system and to iron out any problems people were having, or any misunderstandings. The team all work in quite a similar way, so we managed to get our practice standardised within a couple of months. Any particular issues with members of staff were dealt with through our regular supervision sessions."

Focus group participant

Setting dates for the review of indicators and systems was another technique used, although of course they varied. Supporting People outcomes pilot teams planned to review some indicators but not the systems they had developed, perhaps because the nature of a pilot is to experiment and adapt while it is running. Rochdale is in the process of rolling out their pilot system across all Supporting People funded services in the area. The regional pilot for Yorkshire and the Humber is now fully rolled out across Sheffield and has been launched for all services in the region.

Organisations implementing outcomes measurement systems for internal use did state the need for review of both indicators and the overall system, although there was a wide degree of variation in the length of time this may take, ranging from a review of indicators at the six month stage for one organisation to a three year review of the overall system in another.

All implementing organisations stated the need for regular review of indicators, and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms more widely, due to changing external demands, a changing internal environment and in several cases feedback from clients.

In Conclusion

Standardisation across an organisation can be problematic when services are delivered to a diverse client group. Some types of services may also find measuring outcomes difficult; however, we believe that any service working with individuals over a period of time should be able to measure distance travelled. This will prove more difficult in organisations with an acceptance culture but should be challenged. If organisations cannot (or will not) show the benefits of the work they do, there is a real issue in the appropriate use of public funds in supporting their work. Quality control is essential to ensure consistency and applicability of the systems in place and all monitoring and evaluation systems should be regularly reviewed.

External implementation and dissemination

Income generation activity

Third sector organisations designing indicator banks expressed their interest in exploring income generation by selling the model and training to other organisations. This has prevented the free sharing of indicators across organisations in order to protect potential future income.

“We plan on creating a package of training and consultancy, and have undertaken quite a lot of market research... organisations have come to us to ask us if they could buy in our services in that way, but this is something we haven’t had capacity to deliver before now. We are currently recruiting for a Business Development Manager – this will be one of their first tasks.”

Indicator bank designer

However, no organisations participating in this study are currently generating income from this source and there is no evidence to suggest that implementing organisations are buying outcomes measurement packages from other third sector bodies. Implementing organisations have incurred costs through training and consultancy, but this has generally been from highly regarded consultancy organisations. Many resources are available to organisations interested in implementing an outcomes measurement system internally at a low cost through funded projects such as the National Outcomes Programme and Homeless Link’s recent Quality Project.

Supporting People teams have been keen to disseminate their models free of charge through participation in workshops, making material available for uploading onto second tier websites, writing articles for trade press, or speaking at conferences. This dissemination has led to free sharing of indicators and systems. The Outcomes Star is also available on a free to download basis.

Feeding into policy

There is great variation in the extent to which organisations have been able, or have sought, to influence policy at a local or national level relating to outcomes. Implementing organisations taking part in Supporting People pilot projects will have fed into policy making at the local level, being as involved as they have in the design of systems. The formal working group convened to feed into the development of the national Supporting People indicator bank and outcomes measurement system with policy makers including Triangle Consulting on behalf of the London Housing Foundation, Supporting People lead officers and large housing and homelessness organisations from around the country.

“I see the role of the Foundation to act as an honest broker, not representing a partisan point of view. This is why we have supported Triangle Consulting to sit on the working group – the consultants have a wealth of experience in the implementation of outcomes approaches across organisations and can feed that learning into the national framework.”

Kevin Ireland, Director of the London Housing Foundation

Bringing organisations together to share learning is also informing policy at the local level. Through Homeless Link’s outcomes seminars, Supporting People teams are

consulting and using pre-planned seminars and events to bring organisations together to discuss their approach. They are also rolling out standard systems across a region help to increase opportunities for benchmarking and peer learning. This then feeds back into a virtuous circle that affects commissioning decisions and strategy.

Larger organisations with dedicated policy teams are feeding into government consultations on the future of outcomes measurement systems. Relevant consultations include those on the future of Supporting People, the Leitch review of learning and skills activity, and ongoing informal consultation with the Office of the Third Sector, a recently established unit of the Cabinet Office.

In Conclusion

There is a limited market for outcomes measurement systems to be used on an income generation basis, due to the free availability of systems used around the country and a real willingness to share learning between organisations. There is a small market for training in the use of systems and training is currently on offer from Sitra and Charities Evaluation Services. The question for those organisations looking to generate income from this source is whether it will be sustainable in the longer term. There is some evidence of influencing policy at a local level, and strong evidence of learning from frontline housing and homelessness agencies feeding into national policy.

Conclusions

Housing and homelessness organisations have been exploring the use of outcomes measurement systems for some time.

The most significant drivers include London Housing Federation's IMPACT programme, changes in the funding environment (especially the emergence of Supporting People), and a culture of peer learning where organisations adopting an outcomes approach have been keen to share their learning and experiences with others. The uptake of peer learning activities around outcomes approaches has been consistently high for the last two years.

However, the housing and homelessness sector is diverse. Uptake of outcomes monitoring has varied considerably, dependent on a range of factors including organisational culture (outcomes measurement is less likely to receive attention in organisations with an acceptance culture); whether services are commissioned or delivered on a voluntary basis; and the skills and abilities of staff working within them.

The need by central and local government for aggregated data that will help them justify spend on this type of service at an intra-departmental level of government is sometimes at odds with service providers' wish to adopt outcomes measurement systems that provide meaningful and real information on progress for client and frontline worker.

This has resulted in a split between organisations wishing to measure distance travelled for clients, and use an outcomes measurement system as a frontline tool, and organisations using outcomes measurement systems to deliver data which can be aggregated across an organisation, and across a funding stream. Some tools, such as the Outcomes Star, have the potential to offer both. If practice improves across the sector and agencies continue to invest in internal systems improvements then both outputs are possible.

We believe that organisations that embrace the concept of moving people forward to independence can benefit a great deal from adopting an outcomes measurement system, and those that do not embrace the concept of moving people to independence could benefit from reviewing their strategic mission.

Recommendations

Based on this report, Homeless Link recommends the following:

For funders

- If a funder is considering adopting an outcomes approach, organisations and service users should be consulted and involved in the design of both the outcomes and indicators, and on the system used to measure these.
- It is desirable to establish a steering group of providers to consult with during design phases.
- Funders should also view the adoption of an outcomes approach as a long-term change and expect at least an 18-month period for piloting and capacity building.
- Funders should consider providing support (financial and in-kind) for agencies so they can develop new systems where appropriate.
- When rolling a system out to providers, funders should consider facilitating benchmarking activities and making data available across organisations.

For service providers

- Organisations should consult widely with staff and service users prior to the adoption of a new outcomes measurement system, and incorporate feedback into the design stage.
- Organisations should consider investing in internal systems to ensure both consistency of use of an outcomes system across their organisation and for the production of management data.
- If organisations are unwilling or unable to implement an outcomes measurement system, senior staff and trustees should consider the extent to which organisational culture may be affecting this.

Recommendations for further research

- This research has not assessed whether the adoption of outcomes measurement in one aspect of an organisation's work leads to improved ability to assess change across other aspects of organisational work.
- It has also not been possible to assess whether measuring outcomes actually leads to better work, as opposed to a better description or measurement of existing work.
- There may be some benefit in researching whether a market exists for a sectoral indicator bank.

Annex I: Overview of Supporting People

Supporting People is the first co-ordinated national programme to deliver 'housing related support' for vulnerable people, including rough sleepers and other homeless people. Launched on 1 April 2003, the national budget brought together a number of existing funding streams and separated out the cost of support. In 2006/7 the programme cost £1.72 billion in England, around £350 million of which pays for support for homeless individuals. Over two thirds of Supporting People services are delivered by third sector agencies or housing associations. For services aimed at socially excluded groups, an estimated 80% are delivered through the third sector. The programme is probably the single largest Government investment in third sector services, and therefore its administration, monitoring and evaluation processes are a powerful force for change in the third sector environment.

'Housing related support' is somewhat difficult to define. Supporting People teams around the country vary in their understanding of the definition; in some localities it may be used for education, training and employment related activity, while in others this activity falls outside the definition and therefore the remit of work to be funded by this stream.

The range of client groups supported by this funding stream include:

- People who have been homeless or a rough sleeper
- Ex-offenders and people at risk of offending and imprisonment
- People with a physical or sensory disability
- People at risk of domestic violence
- People with alcohol and drug problems
- Teenage parents
- Elderly people
- Young people at risk
- People with HIV and AIDS
- People with learning difficulties
- Travellers
- Homeless families with support needs¹³

This probably represents the most exhaustive list possible of client groups in need of support and placed the funding for services working with vulnerable people on a longer-term basis.

Supporting People has also created significant change in the sector's operating environment, and organisations funded by Supporting People now work within a contracting culture with monitoring and evaluation built in as a requirement of funding. This kind of external scrutiny and change in organisational accountability represented a real shift, and has probably been the single biggest influence on service improvement in the sector in the last ten years. Nigel Rogers, formerly director of SITRA¹⁴, stated at a recent conference:

¹³ Source: <http://www.spkweb.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/06E6FD41-4804-4B78-BDD9-343EC58117A2/4165/WhatisSuppPeopleLP.pdf>

¹⁴ The umbrella organisation for supported housing providers.

“The shift that has occurred over the last ten years is one of administrative control to strategic control... for example – prior to the introduction of Supporting People, housing related support was administered at the local level. As long as you fit the criteria, you received the funding. The role of the voluntary sector then was to act as advocates for clients and help them fit the criteria! Under Supporting People, that has shifted to strategic control – it’s a much more sophisticated mechanism of commissioning services and is now increasingly evidence based in terms of needs and prevalence of client groups”

The shift to a contracting culture has meant a real change in role for the third sector, and many organisations are vocally concerned about what they see as their diminishing independence. This belief may have some merit, but the shift to strategic commissioning has resulted in better service provision for clients. In order to remain viable, organisations have had to shift position from being a critical and vocal outside force to one of strategic influence, working with commissioners to share knowledge of the needs of client groups and the sorts of services which meet these needs. This is a very uncomfortable fit for some third sector organisations.

Monitoring and evaluation within Supporting People

Prior to Supporting People, the monitoring and evaluation of services were patchy at best, with little external meta-evaluation. Whilst many of the better organisations commissioned external evaluations of services, there is no evidence to suggest that the majority did so. In 2001, Homeless Link, seeing the lack of quality systems aimed specifically at homelessness organisations, developed the Quality Toolkit (based on Charities Evaluation Services’ PQASSO framework) to meet this need. An internal evaluation of the toolkit in 2006 found that there had however been limited take up, as the vast majority of homelessness agencies had come under the scrutiny of the monitoring and evaluation processes of Supporting People.

These were the Quality Assessment Framework (QAF) and subsequent service review process undertaken by local authority service commissioners. The QAF covers standards of service delivery within needs and risk assessment, support planning, security, health and safety, protection from abuse, fair access to services and complaints. The QAF focused on the quality and standardisation of procedures and processes. Each Supporting People funded service undertook an internal review in line with the QAF, which was then reviewed by a local authority review officer. Skill sets and experience of these staff vary widely. Clients’ views were sought during the external review process. A higher level and more challenging system, QAF plus, was also available for those organisations that wished to undertake a more detailed service evaluation.

Whilst the QAF was based on national standards, the reviews were undertaken at the local commissioning level and therefore varied substantially around the country. Local authority commissioners undertook reviews alongside the development of local Supporting People strategies, which aimed to provide an evidence base from which to revise commissioned services in line with local needs and requirements. This improvement in monitoring and evaluation also brought an increased professionalism, a standardisation of service delivery and a welcome focus on client involvement in the service review process.

The QAF was not without limitations. Whilst the QAF focused on the quality of service provision, monitoring of services was based on outputs. There was no mechanism to assess the effectiveness of service delivery for clients at an individual level, organisational level and across organisations funded within the programme. Some third sector providers also complained of a tick box attitude by review officers; others felt the review process was unnecessarily intrusive and controlling.

The service review process has now been superseded by changes in policy at a national level. The Supporting People policy team, based at CLG, have developed an outcomes monitoring framework as the next phase in assessing services. The national outcomes framework is based on the outcomes defined under the 'Every Child Matters' programme¹⁵. The framework will show the distance travelled for clients in receipt of Supporting People funded services against five main domains, within which sit outcomes indicators. The five domains are:

- Economic Well Being
- Enjoying and Achieving
- Be Healthy
- Staying Safe
- Making a Positive Contribution

The national framework does not allow assessment of distance travelled by clients over a period of time; rather it provides a basket of indicators which are used to show the 'end outcome' for a client.

Alongside the development of the national outcomes framework, there have been a number of regional and local pilots of outcomes measurement systems, undertaken in partnership between local Supporting People teams and third sector providers, including a pan-regional pilot in Yorkshire and the Humber. Some of these pilots have used distance travelled measures.

The local pilots tested outcomes measurement frameworks, mostly looking at distance travelled for clients, on a range of outcome domains with different outcome indicators. The pilots have been variable in quality, consistency and in the way local providers (and clients) have been involved in the design phase. There is evidence of some confusion between outcomes, outputs and indicators within commissioning teams.

The national outcomes framework will be rolled out at the local level over the next year. At present, no targets have been set for nationally aggregated outcomes, because the framework and implementation systems are still in infancy, and local flexibility is still anticipated. However, it is highly likely that at some stage national targets will be set. No regional or local pilots identified as part of this research have set targets for local providers, again due to the fact that systems are still in the implementation phase.

¹⁵ Every Child Matters: Change for Children is a new approach to the well-being of children and young people from birth to age 19. The programme places better outcomes for children firmly at the centre of all policies and approaches involving children's services. The programme demands that all organisations that provide services to children work together in more integrated and effective ways. The need for change was made apparent in Lord Laming's report into the death of Victoria Climbié. The report highlighted a need for improved integration and accountability across children's services.

The political environment

The initial estimates of Supporting People costs were around £850 million, based on estimates based on previous funding streams. When services were audited at the local level however, true costs were found to be almost double. Due to such a large discrepancy between projected spend and actual spend, the Communities and Local Government department are under pressure to justify this level of expenditure to the Treasury. As such, the quality of monitoring and evaluation of services provided under this stream – and the ability to aggregate data at a national level - is vital in proving the department's case. The 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review will undoubtedly consider the amount of money spent on housing related support.

The policy and commissioning chain is as follows:



Monitoring and evaluation data is required for different reasons at each stage of the chain. Equally importantly, the political or strategic aims of organisations differ at each stage of the chain.

Between the Treasury and department for Communities and Local government, better monitoring and evaluation data is required of the latter by the former in order to justify continued high levels of spend at a time when other key public services such as health and education are facing spending caps and reductions. However, nationally aggregated data will be difficult to supply in any meaningful sense given the flexibility with which local commissioners can implement outcomes measurement systems.

Government Offices at present play a limited role in the commissioning process for Supporting People services and do not require monitoring and evaluation data from local Supporting People teams. However, their role will grow increasingly important under the emerging Local Area Agreement agenda. Supporting People funding will

not be ring-fenced after 2009; local authorities will directly negotiate local area agreements with government offices for services commissioned in line with strategic local needs assessments.

Local Supporting People teams require monitoring and evaluation data in order to analyse how well (or otherwise) existing services meet identified client needs and prevalence within the local area. Commissioners are also under a range of different political and evaluation agendas, including the outcome of the Gershon review¹⁶ and the Audit Commission inspection regime¹⁷.

¹⁶ The Gershon review of public sector spending, undertaken in 2004/05, created a requirement for local and central government to drive down costs, create efficiency savings in procurement, commissioning and service provision, and increase the use of automated systems to decrease headcount.

¹⁷ Local authorities are subject to assessment by the Audit Commission under the Comprehensive Performance Assessment regime, which focuses on the effectiveness of local services, direction of travel for the authority concerned, and considers value for money.

Annex 2: Methodology

Homeless Link held 15 semi-structured interviews between April and June 2007. Homeless Link used the following interview guide sheet:

Drivers for adoption of an outcome monitoring approach

- What were the external drivers for your organisation in adopting this approach?
- What were the internal drivers for your organisation?
- What are the factors constraining your organisation from adopting an outcomes measurement system?

Making the decision

- Which models did you consider adopting?
- If this process was directed by your funders, were you involved in the design of the system? Were clients involved in indicator and outcome choice?
- If you designed your own indicators, did you involve clients?
- If you selected an existing set of indicators, were clients involved in the selection process?
- What processes did you go through to forecast how easy it would be to implement the chosen model and what funders would think about it?
- How did you demonstrate the value of the chosen model to your staff, trustees and funders?

Implementation

- What lessons did your organisation learn during the implementation process?
- How was the model rolled out across the organisation? What communications activities did you undertake with staff and clients to assist roll out?
- Did any of the indicators change over the implementation phase – were some seen as more valuable than others?
- How are indicators measured? Is there a paper based system in place, or has information technology been the main way of recording outcomes?

Standardisation vs. flexibility

- Have the same indicators been used in a standard way across the organisation?
- If not – how are indicators used across the organisation?
- What quality controls are in place?
- When do you plan to review your indicators?

External implementation and dissemination

- Have you made your indicators available to other organisations?
- Are you planning on using your model as an income generation tool?

Feeding into policy

- What information have you fed back to funders? How has this been received?
- Have you responded to any government consultations on outcomes, monitoring or indicator banks?

Following several interviews it became apparent that not all questions were relevant or valid.

The selection of questions under 'Making the decision' was based on what proved to be the false assumption that the organisations follow a linear process when deciding which outcomes measurement system to implement. In practice, decision making is more organic. Research uncovered very little to justify the assumption that forecasting had taken place to assess the ease of the implementation phase, and that the role of the client throughout the process was much more subtle and dynamic than originally perceived. The level of client involvement was also found to be highly dependent on organisational culture.

The questions were designed for organisations that had fully implemented an outcomes measurement approach. During the process of research, the research team spoke to several organisations who were at an earlier stage of decision making than had been anticipated. Although this provided highly informative in analysing the issues during this phase of the process, it meant that the questions based on 'Feeding into policy' were less testable. The conclusions drawn in that section should therefore be considered with caution.

Homeless Link triangulated the findings within this report with evidence from its own experience of providing direct infrastructure support to an additional 33 organisations which are in the process of implementing outcomes measurement systems around the country.

Interview participants were drawn from a range of organisations, including organisations that have implemented an outcomes monitoring approach:

Broadacres Housing Association	Society of St. James
Cardboard Citizens	Christian Alliance Housing Association
NCH	Single Homeless Project
M25 Housing and Care	

Homeless Link also spoke to organisations that have designed indicator banks:

Broadway
Off the Streets and into Work (OSW)
Triangle Consulting

Several funding organisations were also interviewed:

Supporting People Sheffield (ROSYH)
Supporting People Rochdale
London Councils
Job Centre Plus
OSW

Two focus groups were also in Rochdale and Southampton with organisations about to implement new outcomes systems. Participants were:

Focus Futures	Crewe YMCA
Women's Housing Action Group	St John's Church
St Mary's Rainbow Centre	Swaythling Housing Society
Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council	Two Saints
Booth Centre	Stonham Housing Association