

Tracey Logan
Chief Executive
Scottish Borders Council

20th June 2013

Dear Tracey

Quality Assurance (QA) of Draft Single Outcome Agreements (SOAs)

Thanks for organising the very constructive engagement with yourself, your staff and Scottish Government colleagues. The discussion very usefully clarified a number of issues for both Danny and I, and focused our thinking on the strengths of your approach and areas for development across this year.

On strengths, the partnership has created a powerful and cohesive vision for the Borders across the next 10 years with an intelligent emphasis on the economy and reducing inequalities. The “understanding of place” that underpins the vision is excellently expressed and evidenced, both in the introductory overview and across the partnership programmes. The analysis of inequality “gaps” is extensive and well linked to the focus on deprived communities throughout the piece. Finally, the Partnership Improvement Plan is well designed, and addresses the key points in the recent Audit Scotland report.

The development areas we would recommend seek to build on the clear strengths identified, and largely develop the focus and the logic of the draft SOA. These are:

1. The analysis of place identifies that there are a number of communities in the Scottish Borders that are experiencing interrelated relatively poor outcomes. Two of these are prioritised, the most vulnerable, but others are experiencing serious issues. We suggest the SOA might include integrated targets (perhaps a matrix of 6 – 10 key indicators) for supporting these communities to achieve more positive outcomes across health, learning and development, employment and employability, income and safety and resilience. The matrix would provide a baseline and change to that baseline would measure progress over time.
2. The SOA notes the “total place” type initiatives with particularly challenged communities. It emerged in discussion that these are pilots to explore a fully integrated approach across the partnership to dealing with the need of those “communities in the round”. We think this is a very important development and that it would be helpful to spell out the pilot status of these initiatives in greater detail including the forms of integration, capacity building and resourcing that will be adopted and tested. It would also be helpful to indicate the degree of “roll out” to other communities intended. Our sense is that a neighbourhood/community level of planning, integrated service delivery and more flexible use of existing resources may be relevant to all the communities in your bottom quintile SIMD. These commendable

- initiatives reinforce the point above about potentially including a matrix of outcome improvement targets for actual communities within your performance framework.
3. Our sense is that your performance framework is still a work in progress and would benefit from some rationalisation and consolidation. The model might be your concise and focused set of indicators and targets for the economy and infrastructure theme. These are limited in number, evidence based and clearly quantified. Other themes and the prevention plan, particularly the inequality theme, have a large number of indicators but largely without clear targets. We would suggest this could be rationalised in three ways:
- (a) Noting that outcome improvement targets (e.g. increasing numbers in employment) are more or less expressible as prevention targets (e.g. reducing unemployment). We are not sure you need both as they will tend simply to express the same change in different ways.
 - (b) For each theme, report only key headline indicators relevant to the strategic purpose, role and accountabilities of the CPP Board. Other more detailed indicators may be reported for theme or service management purposes, but the SOA should be focused on strategic outcomes only. Only quantified targets should be included for the short to medium term.
 - (c) The key strap-line for strengthening CPPs is that they should deliver “demonstrable improvements in people’s lives”. It is sensible in the light of that to include only a small number of indicators and targets that are truly predictive of that (e.g. S4 tariff is much more predictive of subsequent educational, employment and income outcomes than any other education indicator).

We suggest therefore no more than around 10 indicators under each theme with linkage through to the strategic priorities set by the Board. We suggest that you consider integrating outcome improvement and prevention targets in each theme and we suggest an additional reporting theme for your “total place” pilots with an integration of improvement indicators and targets for each particular community involved.

Given the discussion with you, we finally suggest that each theme for performance reporting has a short introductory narrative on the challenges and opportunities generated for that theme by changes in the wider environment (e.g. welfare reform, public sector retrenchment, etc.). This will provide clarity as to why targets have been set as they have.

4. On resourcing, we have sympathy with your view that this is about using real resources more creatively and productively rather than simply comparing budgets. However, this does run the risk of not seeming to commit to much around resourcing and resource shift at all. We would suggest three ways of developing this.

First, make it clear that implementation planning and delivery will encompass how resources can be used in new ways and for greater impact for both the strategic

themes and the “total place” pilots. Second, the performance framework for improved outcomes provides a control on whether resources are being used more productively and effectively than before. Finally, as budgeting does matter, it may be sensible for each partner to present to the CPP Board on how their budget proposals for the forthcoming year will support and advance the priorities set by the Board, i.e. the Board should have a right to comment before budgets are formally set.

5. We were impressed with the Partnership Improvement Plan and think it could usefully be more formally integrated into the SOA. It is fundamental to effective governance, performance and increasing impact, and there is good sense in including partnership improvement as a key cross cutting theme in the SOA.

Three points should be made to pull this together. We have identified areas for development, and made suggestions, but these are meant to be helpful not prescriptive. There may be other, and better, ways of addressing these development areas locally. For the present, agreeing the areas for development is the priority. These developments are intended to be undertaken across the next year, not the next week or month. They might sensibly be built into the Partnership Improvement Plan and monitored on that basis. Finally, we would be happy to support these developments in any way that is useful and, specifically, to discuss our conclusions with the Board if that would be helpful.

We hope these observations are helpful and look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely

Colin Mair
Chief Executive