



The Importance of Outcomes - Measuring the Impact

What is an outcome?

There are many definitions of outcomes. Outcomes are about making a difference through some kind of activity. The definition that we choose to use is:

“A valued change resulting in an impact, benefit, learning or other effect as a result of a particular activity or activities”

What do outcomes look like?

In light of the ongoing financial challenges faced by the council and its partners and stakeholders it is vital to consider outcomes in this light – and also to be absolutely clear that they are relevant. When designing outcomes we need to ensure that they:

- Are Directional
- Have Impact
- Are Measurable
- Are clear who they are for / who benefits
- Demonstrate different layers of outcomes
- Show timescales for delivering outcomes

How do we use outcomes?

We want to make sure that the design of any commissioning project meets the outcomes we have identified. We should review the impact that our approach to commissioning has on our customers and communities. It is important that we understand what works well and what needs to change in the way that we commission. To do this we will review how effectively each of the aims set out for your project has been achieved with a focus on the results achieved and the costs saved.

It is also important to evaluate the impact of changes to the way that we commission services and the nature of the services that we commission, as well as the impact of any decommissioning of services. This will help us to understand, and plan for, potential adverse impacts in future.

When commissioning services we will be clear about the outcomes we set out to achieve and how we are going to evaluate whether these are being achieved or not. When determining outcomes we will ensure that they always reference back to the corporate priorities for the council.

The Big Lottery Fund gives some useful guidance on developing outcomes using the characteristics described above:

“Outcomes are the changes that your project can make over time to address the need(s) you have identified. They are the result of what you do, rather than the activities or services you provide. For people, this might be things like improved health, new skills, more confidence or getting a job.

Outcomes are best described using words of change, such as: **more, better, less, improved**. In some cases outcomes may involve keeping a situation stable, or stopping things from getting worse.

Depending on your project, outcomes can occur at different levels, including:

- Individuals and families, for example fathers improve their parenting skills resulting in stronger family relationships
- Communities, for example fewer young people are involved in criminal or anti-social behaviour as a result of participating in a range of positive activities
- The environment, for example improvements in local habitats will lead to higher levels of species biodiversity
- Organisations, for example charities have greater skills and capacity to meet local needs
- Systems and structures, for example a decrease in congestion city-wide from an increase in cycle routes.”

Evaluating / Measuring outcomes

Through engaging as widely as possible when assessing achievement of outcomes, we can get a broad view of the impact of our approach. It is important therefore to use qualitative assessment through engagement with customers and stakeholders.

However, qualitative-only information is often not enough to justify expenditure on a project. Demonstrating achievement of outcomes using data and measures provides a factual base of evidence. Sometimes the evidence can be directly related to the wording of the outcome. Using one of the examples from the Big Lottery above:

Outcome = “Improvements in local habitats will lead to higher levels of species biodiversity”

Evidence = Higher levels of species diversity

At other times we may need to use proxy measures to evidence achievement of outcomes. Often it is a combination of proxy measures which, combined, indicate that it is highly likely that the outcome is being achieved. It also has the benefit of ‘counting’ outputs at the same time.

Additional Resources

“Commissioning for outcomes and co-production. A practical guide for local authorities” – New Economics Foundation

http://b.3cdn.net/nefoundation/974bfd0fd635a9ffcd_j2m6b04bs.pdf

“Commissioning for Better Outcomes: a Route Map” – Local Government Association

<http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/5756320/Commissioning+for+Better+Outcomes+A+route+map/8f18c36f-805c-4d5e-b1f5-d3755394cfab>