

Getting to know you

BUILDING AND USING AN INFORMATION PORTFOLIO
- A GUIDE FOR SERVICE MANAGERS

The Accounts Commission is a statutory independent body which through the audit process of our local authorities and the health sector in Scotland to achieve the highest standards of financial stewardship and the economic, efficient and effective use of their resources.

The Commission has five main responsibilities:

- setting the external audit
- following up issues of concern identified through the audit to ensure satisfactory resolution
- reviewing the management arrangements which audit bodies have in place to achieve value for money
- carrying out national value for money studies to improve economy, efficiency and effectiveness in local government and the NHS
- issuing an annual direction to local authorities which sets out the range of performance information which they are required to publish

The Commission secures the audit of 32 councils, 30 joint boards (including police and fire services), 15 health boards, 46 NHS trusts and six other NHS bodies. In total, these organisations spend public funds worth around £12 billion a year.

This is the fourth in a series of management papers produced by the Management Studies Unit. These papers are intended to support good practice in public sector management by disseminating ideas, approaches and techniques which managers should find useful.

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Introduction

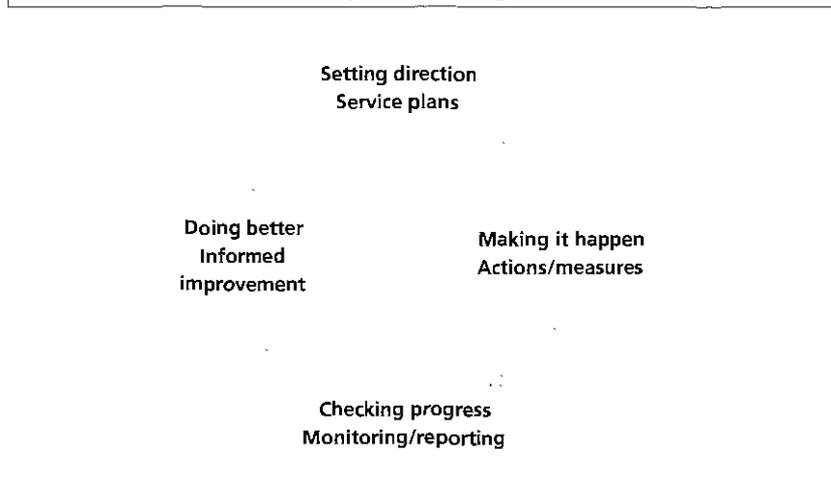
The Government's best value regime requires councils to deliver sound strategic, operational and financial management. They must also demonstrate clearly and openly through public performance reporting that continuous improvement is being pursued. Good management information on performance lies at the heart of delivering these requirements.

This paper aims to support the development of management information through the use of information portfolios. Put simply, an information portfolio is the total set of performance information each manager needs to collect, monitor and report to demonstrate the extent to which they are addressing their management responsibilities.

The paper provides guidance to managers on how to plan, build and use an information portfolio for their service(s). It provides a structured and systematic approach to deciding what information needs to be included in the portfolio and what should be reported to whom, when and in what form. The paper also outlines a number of useful techniques for monitoring, analysing and communicating the information in the portfolio to stakeholder groups interested in service performance.

The paper is aimed at middle tier service managers, focusing particularly on the information they need for managerial purposes. However, it will also be useful to managers designing or contributing to their council's approach to public performance reporting.

Exhibit 1: The role of monitoring and reporting in continuous improvement



"We are talking about a new philosophy that regards performance measurement as an ongoing, evolving process"

Rogers, 1999

"The question is no longer whether performance should be measured but rather:

- **What** aspects of performance should be measured?
- **Who** should decide and use the measures?
- **How**, and by whom, should they be used?"

Rogers, 1999

The information portfolio: a systematic approach to monitoring and reporting

Identifying, monitoring and communicating performance information is essential for three purposes:

- to ensure that managers have effective **control** of their use of resources
- to allow stakeholders to hold them to account for service performance
- to allow senior managers and elected members to make informed decisions about the need for changes in service policy or delivery.

"...in some local authorities, managers and councillors base their choice of performance indicators largely on what they currently have available or what has been imposed on them by external bodies, without any clear overview of what the resulting set of indicators adds up to."

Rogers, 1999

This paper provides managers with a systematic approach to achieving these objectives through the development and use of an information portfolio. The paper sets out the key steps to developing an effective portfolio. It encourages and assists managers to:

- identify the different stakeholders with an interest in the performance of their service(s)
- plan and build an information portfolio for their service which includes all of the information needed by each stakeholder group and any additional information needed by the manager to manage the service
- make sure that each stakeholder group receives the information that is relevant to them at the right time in the right format through effective public performance reporting
- identify benchmarks and performance parameters to allow service performance to be compared with agreed standards and targets, past performance and the performance of other providers
- use diagrams and tables to assist in monitoring and communicating information on performance
- use concise narrative to describe and explain performance in written reports
- supplement written performance reports with structured presentations
- include recommendations in performance reports for a manageable number of focused and prioritised improvements relating to the information being communicated.

Planning an information portfolio

Building an information portfolio

Using the portfolio

Pinpointing common problems

An information portfolio is the total set of performance information which each manager needs to collect, monitor and report to demonstrate the extent to which they are addressing their management responsibilities.

The broad framework below identifies the categories of information managers will want for their portfolio. The information is not an end in itself. Rather, it allows managers and stakeholders to make judgements about the overall performance of the service. These judgements are also shown in the framework.

The framework has been sub-divided into three sections covering strategic performance, operational performance and stakeholder expectations/perceptions. Detailed guidance on the content of each category is given later in the paper.

Exhibit 2: Categories of information in the portfolio

	Judgements to be made	Information relating to
Strategic performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the service performing as planned in achieving its strategic objectives? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • performance in delivering identified strategic (medium to long-term) objectives
Operational performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the service performing economically and efficiently? • Is the right balance being achieved between cost and quality? • Are projects on target and delivering the expected benefits? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • resource inputs • service outputs • financial management • people management • project management • risk management • asset management • procurement management
Stakeholders expectations and perceptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are stakeholders satisfied with the policy? • Are they satisfied that agreed service levels and standards are being delivered? • Are they satisfied with standards of customer care • Are their information needs being met? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stakeholders' priorities and expectations of services (from consultation) • levels of satisfaction (eg from surveys or user panels) • comments and complaints • expectations of reporting frequencies, channels and formats

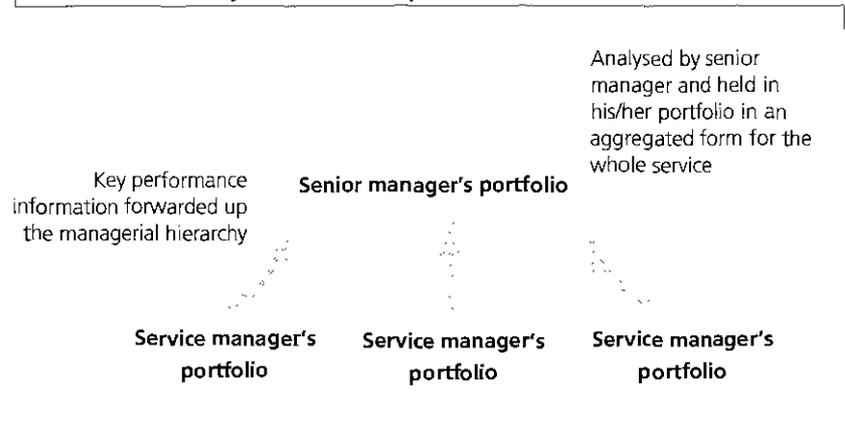
What will each manager have in their portfolio?

Each manager will have their own information portfolio. It will contain all of the information which that manager needs to fulfil their particular managerial responsibilities. Managers with similar functional responsibilities may well have very similar information portfolios.

There will also be some commonality in the information held in the portfolios of different tiers of management within any one department. For example, leisure centre managers will gather detailed information on the performance of their particular facilities. Senior leisure managers on the other hand will monitor the overall performance of each facility. They will also aggregate the information to assess the performance of the service as a whole.

Service managers need to analyse the information for their service and communicate it to senior managers in a form which meets their information needs. Senior managers in turn need to analyse what the information tells them about the performance of the service as a whole.

Exhibit 3: A hierarchy of information portfolios



Each analysis stage requires managers to make the judgements about service performance set out in exhibit 2 on the previous page. To do so, managers should:

- ensure that the information collected is robust and accurate
- evaluate what the information tells them about service performance
- decide whether or not any action is required
- determine how performance can best be communicated to other stakeholders (in a manner which reflects their interest in the service).

Particular attention should be paid to the robustness and accuracy of the information being collected. Poor quality or inaccurate information is likely to paint a misleading picture of actual service performance. This can often result in inaccurate judgements about the adequacy of current activity and ill-informed decisions about the need for and direction of service change.

To ensure that all of the required information is collected, managers need to identify each of the stakeholder groups with an interest in their service. These will include:

- senior managers
- elected members
- customers
- citizens
- employees
- auditors and inspectors
- the media.

The portfolio should include information which meets the needs of *each* group of stakeholders. Many of these information needs will be identified as part of the service planning process. Feedback from stakeholders on their priorities and expectations will indicate the key areas of performance in which each group has an interest. Managers can use this information to set objectives and targets for the service. Performance can be measured against these and progress reported back to each group. Stakeholders will make judgements about service performance as a result.

As part of the process, managers should consider whether information is needed:

- by activity (rather than for the service as a whole)
- by geographical area (rather than for the council as a whole)
- by customer segment (breaking down the customer base into different groups based on age, gender, socio-economic factors, ethnicity, place of residence, etc).

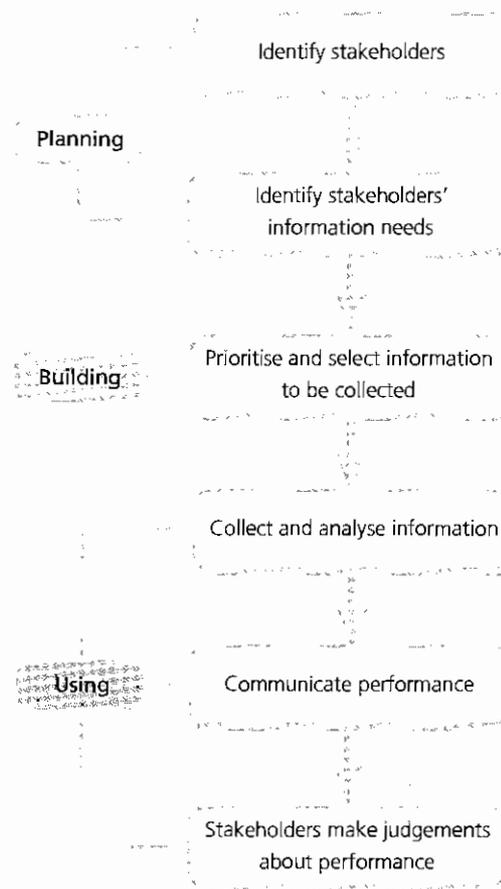
This will determine the detail of the information being collected and the type of analysis which can be undertaken.

Increasingly, councils are using consultation to ask stakeholders specifically:

- what information they would like
- how often they would like it
- in what format they would like it provided
- what channels they want the council to use to communicate the information to them.

All of this information needs to be included in the portfolio. It is critical to effective public performance reporting.

Exhibit 4: Planning, building and using the information portfolio



A good indicator of performance

Managers need to think about what indicators they will use to focus the information being collected into a measurable form (eg what indicators will be used to assess the information on service outputs?)

Indicators should be:

- **relevant** - relating directly to the objectives which have been set and relevant to the managers and stakeholders using the information
- **unambiguous** - it should be clear how changes in the indicator reflect changes in the performance of the service
- **cost effective** - the costs of collecting and monitoring the information should not exceed the benefits
- **simple** - it should be readily understandable to those using the information what the indicator means, how it is measured and how their own performance can affect it.
- **output and outcome oriented** - focusing where appropriate on what the service is delivering rather than the inputs to the service.

Monitoring and reporting performance will test the effectiveness of the initial indicators selected. Managers should therefore see the identification of "ideal" performance indicators as an evolutionary process.

The concept of an information flow helps to explain how the information in each portfolio fits into the overall process of performance monitoring and reporting for the service. Exhibit 5 demonstrates how this works.

- **Local service managers** analyse the performance information they collect/monitor and communicate it to **senior managers**.
- Analysed information is usually also made available **directly** to users of the service at the point of use (via notice-boards, user groups, newsletters, etc).
- **Senior managers** monitor, process and communicate elements of overall service performance to **elected members**.
- Following member consideration, key messages about performance and any proposed changes to the service are communicated to other **stakeholders** (such as customers, citizens, staff and auditors).

Exhibit 5: The information flow



The incremental reduction in the size of the boxes in exhibit 5 indicates that the *volume* of information about the local service which each stakeholder is given usually decreases at each stage in the flow. The full portfolio remains available from the local manager in the event that more detailed information is required by any of the stakeholders.

Planning an information portfolio

Building an information portfolio

Using the portfolio

Pinpointing common problems

"Targets are powerful instruments of focus - that is their fundamental purpose - they focus organisational and individual thinking, effort and energy"
Rogers, 1999

The section on planning an information portfolio indicated that three categories of information are needed to make judgements about service performance:

- strategic information
- operational information
- information on stakeholder expectations and perceptions.

The Accounts Commission and The Scottish Office require councils to collect and publish statutory or key performance indicator information. While this information should be included in the portfolio, managers will also need additional information to meet their control and accountability responsibilities and ensure that stakeholders are able to make judgements about service performance.

In addition to the information itself, managers should identify appropriate targets and performance parameters for each element of performance. These provide managers and stakeholders with a basis against which to judge the performance of the service. Once identified, they should also be included in the portfolio.

Targets and performance parameters need to be identified for both quantitative and qualitative information. In the latter case, desired performance may be set out in descriptive terms. Some useful techniques for doing this are introduced later in the paper.

Targets will indicate what might be expected of a service performing effectively. They will include:

- levels or standards of service agreed with stakeholders
- allocated budgets
- agreed project milestones, deadlines and budgets
- levels or standards of past performance (including seasonal fluctuations)
- performance of similar services elsewhere
- descriptions of good practice (for qualitative information).

Performance parameters will be based on these targets. They represent the upper and lower levels of performance around the identified targets which trigger management attention, action and reporting. They are discussed in more detail later in the section.

Consider the extent to which the benchmarks shown in italics allow more informed judgements of service performance to be made:

- leisure centre usage by 720 people in a given month *against a target of 500 and an equivalent last year of 475.*
- total service revenue expenditure of £450,000 *against estimated expenditure of £300,000*
- 22% of pupils in a school gaining three or more Higher passes *against a council average of 35% and a national average of 39%. However, the school's performance represented an increase of 3% on last year.*
- the opening of a new recycling plant *two months before schedule, within the estimated budget.*

Is the service performing as planned
in achieving its strategic objectives?

"performance measurement needs to
be linked directly with the strategies
and plans of each organisation, which
in turn, must derive from the overall
direction that has been established by
elected members and managers"

Accounts Commission, 1998

Strategic information

Information is needed to indicate the extent to which the service (and the council) is achieving its medium to long-term aims and objectives. The information collected by *service managers* will relate to the operational performance of the service. However, aspects of it should also indicate the extent to which identified strategic objectives are being met. These objectives should have been expressed in SMART¹ terms in the departmental service plan.

The detail of the information needed by service managers will be dependent on each individual objective. Attaining some of the objectives will require projects or actions to be completed. Delivering others will be dependent on meeting targets of service output (such as volume of service, usage, coverage, response times, etc). Managers should be clear as to the contributions of their services to achieving strategic objectives and identify the information they need to assess progress against each one.

In the case of a swimming pool, the following SMART objectives have been identified by senior management in the leisure service as contributing to the strategic aim of increasing service usage:

- to increase overall usage of leisure facilities, libraries and museums by 25% by the end of the financial year
- to increase the total number of concession card holders using these facilities by 35%
- to increase revenue from charges at all leisure facilities by 20%.

The swimming pool manager must collect information on operational performance which allows judgements to be made as to the extent of progress on these strategic objectives. The manager has also identified two actions which will contribute to the objectives:

- to set up a local swimming club
- to introduce a free crèche facility to encourage parents to make greater use of the pool.

The council has introduced a computerised leisure card system which contains coded information about each user. This allows users to be identified by age group, gender, occupation, post-code and qualification for concession. The following information is collected and monitored as *part* of the manager's portfolio:

- total usage
- total number of users in each category (concession card holders, age, occupation, post code, etc)
- peaks and troughs in usage (total and group)
- progress in establishing and promoting the club
- number of club members
- proportion of members who hold a concession card
- progress in setting up the crèche (timescale, expenditure, completion date)
- crèche usage (total, peaks and troughs, usage by different groups - including concession card holders).

Performance is assessed against a number of pre-set targets relating to agreed standards, budgets and timescales.

Further information will have been identified at the planning stage to indicate performance against other strategic objectives.

¹ Specific, Measurable, Agreed (or Action-oriented), Realistic and Timetabled.

Is the service performing economically and efficiently?

Is the right balance being reached between cost and quality?

Are projects on target and delivering the expected benefits?

"Local authority managers have often, in the past, made assertions to their elected members that the services they manage are economic, efficient and effective but without providing evidence with which members can test out the assertion."
Rogers, 1999

Are stakeholders satisfied with the policy?

Are they satisfied that agreed service levels and standards are being delivered?

Are they satisfied with standards of customer care?

Are their information needs being met?

"Well chosen and relevant performance indicators can play a significant part in helping to make local authorities more accountable to local taxpayers and the wider community"
LGMB/PPRN, 1997

Operational information

Managers need operational information for day to day management. Annex A outlines key operational information which service managers may want to include in their portfolio. This list is neither prescriptive nor exhaustive in its coverage. It will not be relevant to all managers in all circumstances. However, it does provide a list of core operational information which managers need to consider. The information in the annex is listed under the following headings:

- resource inputs
- service outputs
- financial management
- people management
- project management
- risk management
- asset management
- procurement management
- publicity.

Managers themselves will be the main audience, using the information to indicate the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of day to day service performance. Some elements of operational performance information may also be of interest to other stakeholder groups. This will become apparent when stakeholder information needs are being identified.

Stakeholder expectations and perceptions

The views of stakeholders are being given increased prominence by the government through initiatives on best value and community planning. As indicated earlier, much of the information on stakeholders' priorities and expectations is usually identified during the service planning process. The portfolio should include information on:

- stakeholders' expectations of the level and standard of service
- stakeholders' expectations for the frequency, format and channels to be used for communicating information to them.

It should also contain information on stakeholders' perceptions, including:

- satisfaction with service policies
- satisfaction with charges (where these exist)
- satisfaction with service delivery/performance against agreed standards
- satisfaction with the quality and frequency of information provision
- any changes which stakeholders would like to see.

Monitoring these over time will allow judgements to be made about changes in stakeholders' perceptions of the service. There needs to be consistency in the methods used to gather information if accurate comparisons are to be made.

Comments and complaints can be a particularly useful source of information. They should be viewed positively as a source of valuable customer feedback. Many councils now have a corporate procedure for handling customer comments and complaints. As a minimum, service managers should aim to collect the following information:

- the total number of comments and complaints for each service area
- the nature of the comment or complaint
- the date received
- the time taken to resolve the issue (where there is an issue to resolve)
- whether the comment or complaint was about service policy or performance.

Analysis of these will allow managers to:

- identify where recurring problems are being experienced
- establish the reasons behind expressed dissatisfaction
- identify possible opportunities for improvement.

The varying interests of stakeholders mean that a great deal of information will be generated on expectations and perceptions. Managers' own knowledge and experience will help them to interpret the feedback and abstract the key messages about the performance of their service.

The following checklist should be useful to managers in identifying appropriate sources of information on customer perceptions for their service areas.

Checklist 1: Sources of information

Source of information	Used
consultation exercises	<input type="checkbox"/>
survey returns	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
user groups/panels	<input type="checkbox"/>
comments and complaints	<input type="checkbox"/>
feedback from staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
comments from elected members	<input type="checkbox"/>
feedback at public meetings	<input type="checkbox"/>
reports back from auditors and inspectors	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
articles, letters and editorial comments in the media	<input type="checkbox"/>

Managers can use the checklist in two ways. Firstly, to indicate possible sources of information which *could* be used. Secondly, as a way of checking that all existing sources of information *have* been used when preparing plans or performance reports.

Meeting the information needs of stakeholders - reporting at the right time in the right way

As outlined earlier, the frequencies and channels for communicating information to stakeholders must be identified and included in the portfolio if their information needs are to be met. The frequency of communication will vary depending on:

- the desired frequency of reporting expressed by the stakeholder group
- the importance of the information for control and decision-making.

For control and decision-making, managers should ask themselves two questions when determining the required frequency of reporting:

- is the risk associated with slippage in performance high, medium or low?

If the risk is high, the information should be reported frequently. For example, information on budgetary performance would likely be reported on a monthly basis to senior managers and elected members. If the risk is low, then a less frequent cycle may be appropriate (unless stakeholders have asked for the information more frequently). For example, progress on delivering the council's medium to long-term objectives may only be reported to senior managers and elected members every six months.

- how long will it be before any changes in policy or delivery become apparent in the performance information?

If changes in service performance take six to nine months to become apparent then there may be little point in updating decision-makers on progress each month (unless the risk in this area is such that monthly reporting is appropriate).

The matrix below provides a useful tool for *managing* the communication of information in the portfolio to each stakeholder group. In the case of the swimming pool manager, a completed matrix may look as follows:

Stakeholder group	Communication channel	Frequency	Date of next report	Report deadline
Customers	Leisure Services public performance report	Annually	May	3 April
	Pool customer notice-board	Monthly update	1 September	25 August
	Council website	Monthly update	1 September	25 August
Citizens	Leisure Services public performance report	Annually	May	3 April
Senior managers	Management Team performance report	Quarterly	16 November	2 November
Members	Leisure Services Committee report	6 monthly	17 December	24 November
Staff	Staff newsletter	Quarterly	1 October	20 September

Triggers for reporting outwith the agreed cycle

Managers must also identify what triggers will activate reporting to decision-makers outwith the agreed cycle for regular reporting. The key issue is to identify what the triggers are for each service area and the levels of performance which will trigger action. Triggers typically include:

- cost over-run
- issues of high public concern
- serious health and safety concerns
- significant or sudden change in customer demand
- legislative breaches or the need to respond quickly to legislation or guidance issued at short notice
- performance significantly or consistently below target
- the need for a particular action or decision to be taken as a matter of urgency.

Managers must identify and agree performance parameters for their service in liaison with senior managers and elected members. When performance slips outwith these parameters then action and reporting are triggered. Once identified, the performance parameters should be included in the information portfolio.

Exception reporting relies heavily on the use of performance parameters. In such instances, information is reported only when performance falls outwith the agreed parameters. Managers must be particularly clear as to their monitoring and reporting responsibilities. Exception reporting should only be used in medium to low risk areas (eg the average time taken to process an invoice or reply to correspondence). In such instances, decision-makers are unlikely to want to keep a watching brief on performance. Exception reporting should be avoided in high risk areas.

The following matrix provides an illustration of a structured approach to identifying parameters and triggered actions:

Service element	Parameter	Triggered action
Revenue budget	+/- x% of anticipated cumulative spend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alert head of department immediately • Head of department to report to Chief Executive, Committee Chair and Council Leader • Head of department to report to special meeting of the Policy and Resources Sub-Committee
Service uptake	- x% of anticipated service usage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alert head of department immediately • Head of department to report to Chief Executive, Committee Chair and Council Leader • Head of department and Committee Chair to consider calling special meeting of the service committee
Legislative breach	Breach of legislation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alert head of department immediately • Head of department to report to Chief Executive, Committee Chair and Council Leader • Head of department and Committee Chair to consider calling special meeting of the service committee
Other issues		

Appendix B outlines how techniques such as profiling, Z charts and statistical process control (SPC) charts can be used to assess performance against identified parameters.

The local swimming pool manager will feed the information on the opposite page back to the different stakeholder groups based on the portfolio they have developed. The pool manager needs to collect and monitor all of the information listed, *plus* any additional information they have identified to meet their own day to day managerial responsibilities. The manager also needs to ensure that the information is fed back at a time, in a form and via a channel which meets the expressed needs of each stakeholder group.

In addition, elements of this information may need to be provided to **auditors and inspectors** to allow them to judge whether:

- the service is providing value for money
- the service is managed effectively
- national targets are being met and guidelines followed
- statutory performance information is being collected and published.

Stakeholder group (category of information)	Judgements each group can make	Information needs of each group
Customers		
Strategic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> are our priorities being addressed? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> progress on agreed customer priorities
Operational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> are agreed levels and standards of service being met? are there any changes planned (eg in levels of service, opening hours or charges)? is the service operating cost-effectively? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> activities offered, facility opening hour, charges, proposed changes, performance against output targets (eg pool cleanliness, equipment availability) completion of projects (eg creche development, establishment of the swimming club, marketing campaign) against timetable and budget usage, income generated, level of subsidy
Stakeholder expectations and perceptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> are other users satisfied with the service? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> survey feedback and the council's response complaints (number, resolution, time to respond)
Elected members		
Strategic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> are the contributions to strategic objectives being delivered? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> contribution to strategic objectives (eg increased usage, social strategy aims, energy efficiency improvements)
Operational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> are agreed levels and standards of service being met? are projects being completed effectively? is expenditure within budget? are there opportunities to improve the service? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> performance against operational targets (eg usage, income generated through charges, revenue and capital expenditure, cleanliness) completion of projects (eg creche development, establishment of the swimming club, marketing campaign) against timetable and budget effectiveness of completed projects changes in the range of activities and their subsequent uptake
Stakeholder expectations and perceptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> are service users satisfied? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> customer expectations, satisfaction levels, nature and volume of comments and complaints
Senior managers		
Strategic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> are the contributions to strategic objectives being delivered? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> contributions to strategic objectives (eg increased usage, social strategy aims, energy efficiency improvements)
Operational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> are agreed levels and standards of service being met? is the service operating cost-effectively? is expenditure within budget? are there opportunities to improve the service are there any issues of <i>particular concern</i> regarding people management, support services, asset use, systems or IT? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> performance against operational targets (eg usage, income generated through charges, revenue and capital expenditure, cleanliness) changes in the range of activities and their subsequent uptake completion of identified milestones in key projects <i>issues of concern</i> regarding: people management (staff skills, absenteeism, satisfaction, grievances), health and safety, support service recharges, asset management (equipment obsolescence and renewal), changes in regulations, etc.
Stakeholders expectations and perceptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> are users satisfied with the service? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> customer expectations, satisfaction levels, nature and volume of complaints
Employees		
Strategic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> are customer priorities being addressed? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> progress on agreed user priorities
Operational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> are agreed levels and standards of service being met? are there any changes planned (eg in level of service, opening hours or charges)? is the service operating cost-effectively is the service being managed effectively? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> activities offered, facility opening hours, charges, proposed changes, performance against output targets (eg pool cleanliness, equipment availability) usage, income generated through charges, level of subsidy people management information (training opportunities, staff satisfaction, absence levels, grievances, turnover, etc.)
Stakeholders expectations and perceptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> are users satisfied with the service? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> complaints (number, resolution, time to respond) feedback from consultation and satisfaction surveys

Planning an information portfolio

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Pinpointing common problems

Make performance information meaningful

Communicate concisely

Use presentations to support written information

Managers need to be clear as to how the information can be used most effectively to monitor and report performance and allow judgements about the service to be made. As outlined at the beginning of the paper, performance monitoring and reporting are required for three purposes:

- to ensure that managers have effective **control** of their use of resources
- to allow stakeholders to hold them to **account** for service performance
- to allow senior managers and elected members to make informed decisions about the need for changes in service policy or delivery.

To deliver these objectives, managers need to analyse and communicate the information gathered in their portfolios effectively.

Analysing performance information

The information portfolio for each service will contain a substantial amount of information on performance. A number of useful techniques for assessing both statistical and non-statistical data are introduced in appendix B. These will help managers to increase the effectiveness of their monitoring and reporting.

Communicating the information

The section on stakeholder information needs stressed the importance of identifying the frequency, channel and format in which stakeholder groups need information on performance. A number of further steps can be taken to increase the effectiveness of communication.

Firstly, **concise** and relevant narrative is essential in both written and verbal communication with stakeholders. This is particularly true when frequent use is being made of diagrams or tables. Trends in performance need to be clearly described and explained in terms familiar to the stakeholder group being targeted.

Secondly, supporting presentations are an extremely useful way of making sure that performance is understood by stakeholders. They can be used to support the information included in a written performance report to elected members and senior managers. Similarly, they may be used to communicate performance to customers at public meetings and to auditors and inspectors prior to their more detailed investigations of service performance.

In reports and presentations, managers should:

- outline the key messages relating to each element of performance
- summarise the main trends apparent in the information being presented
- clearly outline the overall performance of the service
- explain what action (if any) is proposed as a result of the analysis.

Although not always possible, presentations can give stakeholders the opportunity to be more actively involved in discussing and assessing service performance. The time spent considering performance will be used more effectively as a result. Stakeholders will also be able to build up a more informed picture of the issues facing the service and make judgements about performance within that context.

Communicate what the information should be used for

Finally, performance reports passed to decision-makers should include clear recommendations for any changes needed to improve performance. This may involve decisions to stop, start or change aspects of the service. Alternatively, senior managers and elected members may be asked to confirm that the performance being reported is acceptable and that service policy and delivery should continue unchanged for the time-being.

There is evidence that where more than six to eight improvement actions are recommended, managers find it difficult to prioritise and implement the required changes. Attention should therefore be focused on a manageable number of SMART recommendations for how service performance could be further improved. Once agreed, these become the priority improvement actions to be progressed by the service manager.

The following checklist should help managers to ensure that they have addressed all the actions required to communicate performance effectively:



Checklist 2: Communicating/reporting



the information meets the needs of the stakeholder group to whom it is being reported

stakeholders are expecting this information OR I have explained why this information is being reported outside the normal cycle

the content of the report and any verbal presentation are consistent

the report/presentation paints a clear picture of service performance

key trends, problems and opportunities for improvement are clearly brought to the attention of decision-makers

SMART recommendations are made which will improve future service performance

Planning an information portfolio

Building an information portfolio

Using the portfolio

Pinpointing common problems

The checklist on the following page can be used to identify where commonly encountered problems may be occurring. A 'x' will indicate an area requiring further attention.



Checklist 3: Commonly encountered problems

Core management information has not been identified and/or monitored



- 1 I am aware of the SMART objectives which have been identified for my service in the service plan.
- 2 I have identified the service stakeholders and their information needs
- 3 strategic, operational and stakeholder information has been identified
- 4 performance is monitored in all of the activities/functions identified in the service plan
- 5 I have identified appropriate indicators to measure performance
- 6 I have identified targets and parameters against which to assess performance
- 7 there is a system (either IT based or manual) in place to collect the information

The information is being collected and monitored, but is not being communicated effectively

- 1 the information content and frequency of reporting match the needs of each stakeholder group
- 2 I am clear as to the reporting channels desired by each group
- 3 I understand how the information represents service performance
- 4 I have reported performance relative to appropriate targets and performance parameters
- 5 effective use has been made of diagrams, tables and concise supporting narrative
- 6 I am aware of the triggers for irregular and exception reporting
- 7 I have considered the use of a supporting presentation
- 8 I have considered a range of techniques to translate the information into a meaningful representation of performance

The information is being collected and communicated, but little use is being made of it by stakeholders or decision-makers

- 1 each stakeholder group is given the information it requires
- 2 I have *not* given stakeholders too much information
- 3 the information being reported paints a clear picture of service performance
- 4 I have considered the use of a supporting presentation
- 5 a clear distinction has been made between the adequacy of service policy and that of subsequent performance
- 6 SMART recommendations are made for improvements when performance is reported to decision-makers
- 7 the recommendations are consistent with agreed service objectives
- 8 targets and performance parameters are clearly indicated

What to do next

Having read this paper, the next stage is for managers to plan, build and use an information portfolio for their service(s). The following matrix can be used to structure this process. It should ensure that all of the issues discussed in this paper are addressed by managers when developing a portfolio. Note that the stakeholder groups identified in the matrix are for exemplification. Managers should identify an appropriate list of stakeholders for their services.

Activity (as referred to in the service plan):					
Which stakeholders are interested in the performance of your service?	Senior managers	Elected members	Customers	Citizens	Employees
What judgements will each stakeholder group wish to make about the service?					
What strategic information do they need?					
What operational information do they need?					
What information on stakeholder expectations and perceptions do they need?					
Against which targets, benchmarks and parameters will performance be assessed?					
What channel(s) will be used to communicate performance?					
How frequently will information be reported through each channel?					
What techniques will be used for monitoring and reporting?					

Conclusion

There are three fundamental reasons for planning, building and using an information portfolio. Firstly, the information is needed for effective managerial control of the service. Secondly, it allows elected members and senior managers to make informed decisions about improvements to policy or service delivery. Finally, it enables stakeholders to make judgements about council performance.

Understanding the expectations and information needs of each stakeholder group is essential when setting service priorities. The information reported back to stakeholders should reflect these priorities and demonstrate the extent to which their expectations have been met.

The portfolio should include information on strategic performance, operational performance and stakeholder expectations and perceptions. Managers must also establish the targets and performance parameters against which performance can be assessed. These should be identified through stakeholder consultation, analysis of past performance and consideration of the levels and standards of service being delivered elsewhere.

A number of principles and techniques are available to managers to help them to monitor and communicate performance effectively. Managers should consider the range of techniques available to make best use the information gathered in their portfolio.

Appendices

Appendix A - Operational Performance Information

Not all elements of this information will be relevant to every activity. The list is neither prescriptive nor exhaustive.

Resource inputs

- levels of revenue and capital expenditure available
- staffing (job categories, grades, gender, age, length of service, skills, qualifications and experience)
- assets (value and amount of property, plant, vehicles, equipment).

Service Outputs

Depending on the service, information may include:

- customer throughput
- response times/time to process applications
- income generation
- frequency of service delivery
- extent/volume of service delivery
- service coverage (geographical, user or need group, tenancy-related, etc).

Financial management

- expenditure against budget (capital and revenue)
- committed expenditure
- unit costs of each element of service activity
- list of budget holders and responsibilities
- projected budgetary implications of service development/change
- invoicing (frequency, cost, time taken; debt profile)
- cash collection/handling (volume, responsibilities, time until banking).

*People management*²

(ideally in total and by category outlined above under the staffing element of resource inputs)

- number, mix and skills base required compared to that available
- training needs of each member of staff
- training received and costs ("lost" time, fees, travel/accommodation costs)
- individuals' performance against team and individual targets
- employee turnover and associated costs (recruitment, training, temp staff)
- induction and briefing frequency, coverage and effectiveness
- staff satisfaction (with communications, management style, training, terms and conditions)
- absence management (lost days, time-keeping, associated costs)
- grievances (levels and nature)
- frequency and nature of individual employee involvement in improvement initiatives.

² Some people management information will be confidential to the employees concerned

Project management

- project inputs (staff, equipment, etc)
- targets (desired output in terms of volume and quality of service or final product)
- project timescale, key milestones and available budget
- progress against these
- the reasons for any slippage
- revised deadlines, expenditure estimates or targets for completion of the project
- information as to any interim changes resulting from progress to date and its implications for timescale, budgets or targets
- arrangements for post-implementation review.

Risk management

- completed assessments of main elements of risk and associated potential costs (or other implications) in all areas of service delivery
- operational arrangements to control risk
- details of compliance with Health and Safety requirements (frequency and findings of checks)
- frequency, costs, location and causes of accidents
- implementation of identified risk management actions/projects.

Asset management

- accommodation costs (rent/rates, heating, lighting, cleaning etc)
- property maintenance costs (capital and revenue)
- performance against energy efficiency targets
- asset utilisation rates
- depreciation of assets (vehicles, plant, equipment)
- obsolescence time(PCs, equipment, plant, vehicles)
- replacement/renewal cycle and costs.

Procurement management

- volume and costs of all items purchased
- order handling and delivery time
- discounts available/received
- re-order cycle
- stock levels and demand
- foreseen changes in future levels and nature of procurement.

Publicity

- cost of publicity
- coverage and focus
- frequency
- perceptions of image and reputation
- stakeholder needs and target market
- assessment of the impact (effectiveness) of publicity.

Additional information

- any other information on key indicators for the service required by the Accounts Commission or The Scottish Office.

Appendix B - Tools and techniques for monitoring and reporting

Using tables

Descriptive or qualitative techniques

Tables can be particularly useful when describing performance against an identified objective or deadline, especially where progress is dependent on completing a specific project. Reference should be made in the table to any milestones, deadlines or resource parameters agreed at the outset of the project. Two examples of the use of tables for project reporting are outlined below. The first highlights interim progress on a project; the second summarises the findings from a completed project.

Exhibit 6: Reporting interim performance against an identified action

Task	Deadline	Progress	Comments	Revised deadline	Implications of revised deadlines
Implement a Geographic Information System (GIS)	July 1999	Software purchased and loaded on schedule. All training completed. Some slippage with data input. Project within agreed budget of £10,000.	Slippage in data input due to underestimate of the scale of the task for support staff within depts.	September 1999	Reliance on manual data bases and hard copy maps for a further six week period. Minor delays in data processing and report production. Negligible deterioration in performance. No cost implications.

Exhibit 7: Reporting performance against a completed action

Task	Deadline	Progress	Comments
Follow-up tenant survey feedback through focus group discussions with local tenants' group on findings and possible solutions.	March 1999	All five focus group meetings were held in February - one with each tenants' group. No direct costs associated with the follow-up exercise.	<p>Focus groups pointed to two key issues causing the dissatisfaction with the time elapsing from job request to job completion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • maintenance staff arriving to undertake the work without appointment (many tenants were not at home; the work therefore had to be rescheduled) • tenants expected non-urgent repairs to be completed sooner than stated in council policy - many tenants were unaware of the timescale for repairs, although not dissatisfied when it was communicated to them. <p>Recommended actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • appointment system to be introduced by the Assistant Director of Housing (Maintenance) by the end of the next quarter • Assistant Director of Housing (Maintenance) to ensure that all staff logging repair requests communicate the emergency, urgent and non-urgent repair timescale to tenants with immediate effect

Developing maturity indices and profiles

Maturity indices allow managers to compare the development of processes or systems against benchmarks of good practice. They describe levels of “minimum”, “good” and “better/best” practice against which current performance can be compared. They are extremely useful in assessing performance in areas where no quantifiable target or standard exists.

Some professional associations have drawn up maturity indices for particular services. Where this has yet to happen, service managers can draw up their own indices. Managers should use their own professional experience to decide what represents adequate practice at its various stages of maturity. These categories then become the benchmarks against which to measure performance. Managers should discuss identified benchmarks with colleagues in the council (and other councils) to make sure that they adequately reflect the expected evolution of the selected processes or systems.

Exhibit 8: Maturity index for an IT help desk (hours of availability)

Minimum practice	Good practice	Best practice
The service desk is open from 8.30am to 5.00pm (4.30pm on Friday)	The service desk is open from 8.00 am to 6.00pm (5.30pm on Friday) and outside these hours on request. Messages can be taken outside the planned hours.	The service desk is open from 7.30 am to 6.00pm (5.30pm on Friday) and a person is on-call during evenings and at weekends.
Current practice The service desk is open during office hours only		

Source: SOGITM, 1998.

On each occasion, managers should indicate whether the current position in the index is acceptable or whether a revised target is necessary. All services need not reach the best practice stage if this is not a priority for the council. However, this should be an explicit choice that can be justified in cost/benefit terms.

In the IT example, it may be that the service desk is only open from 8.30am to 5.00pm because customer sampling has indicated that there is no desire for a service outwith these hours. Alternatively, it may be that under particular resource constraints the additional inputs required to deliver good or best practice are not considered to be a priority.

Maturity indices for each service process can be pulled together into a broader maturity profile for the service as a whole. This allows managers to target specific opportunities for improvement within the service. Exhibit 9 indicates how such a profile might look for the Payroll service.

Exhibit 9: Maturity profile for the Payroll service

Main element	Minimum practice	Good practice	Better practice
Timesheets/ returns from managers	One sheet per record	Timesheets summarised per department	Data entry at source via the use of e-mail
Timesheets/ data accuracy	90% accurate 90% complete 90% on time Errors recorded and analysed manually and fed back to departments.	95% accurate 95% complete 98% on time From analysis, training requirements identified and introduced	98% accurate 99% complete 99% on time Computerised analysis to indicate areas of need, training carried out immediately the error is made or package will not allow errors
Sort into sections and payroll order	Separate timesheets = x hours pa	Summary sheet = x pa	Sorting not required due to electronic transfer
Input data into system	Data entered 99.9% accurate. Standards set and monitored. Throughput as present.	Data entered 99.9% accurate. Standards set and monitored. Throughput increased by 50%.	Data entered 99.9% accurate. Standards set and monitored. Only specialist details entered by payroll staff.
Payroll returned by courier	Next day return	Same day return	Printed on site
Queries back to pay office	Telephone enquiries: 80% answered same day 10% answered next day 10% answered within five days	Telephone enquiries: 90% answered same day 5% answered next day 5% answered within three days Help desks calls logged and analysed. Training needs identified.	Telephone enquiries: 100% answered same day Help desks calls logged and analysed. Training needs identified. Number of calls considerably reduced.
Reporting function	Ad hoc reports produced by Payroll Manager on request.	Exception reports produced by Payroll Manager on request.	Departmental managers can produce exception reports themselves

Source: CIPFA, 1997.

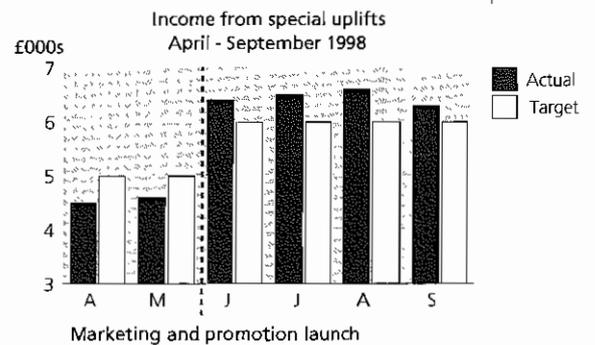
Using diagrams

Diagrams can be particularly effective in monitoring and communicating quantifiable (or statistical) performance data. It can be much easier to pinpoint actual performance from a diagram or graph than it can be from a table of figures. Diagrams are therefore useful to managers when interpreting data and useful to stakeholders assessing the resultant information.

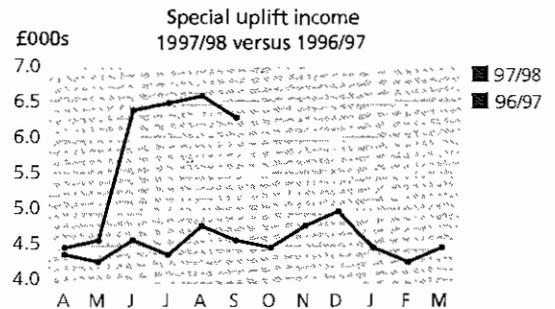
In most instances diagrams can be easily produced by inputting the performance data into basic IT spreadsheet or graphics packages. Exhibit 10 indicates how data on inputs in the refuse collection service can be used to compare performance against targets, past performance and performance elsewhere. Process and output data can also be mapped in this way. Note the use of concise narrative to describe the performance trend.

Exhibit 10: Using diagrams to monitor and communicate comparative performance

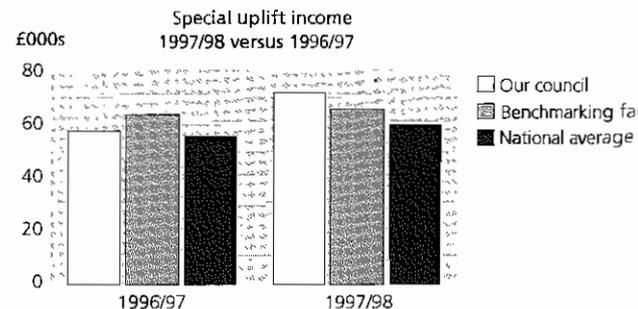
This graph illustrates how income from special uplifts has exceeded target income following the launch of the department's marketing and promotion strategy in mid May. Prior to the launch, actual income fell below target by approximately £500 per month.



This graph illustrates how actual income from special uplifts over the first two quarters compares with that for the same period last year. It is apparent that the marketing and promotion strategy has had an impact in delivering income substantially in excess of that expected from previous annual trends.

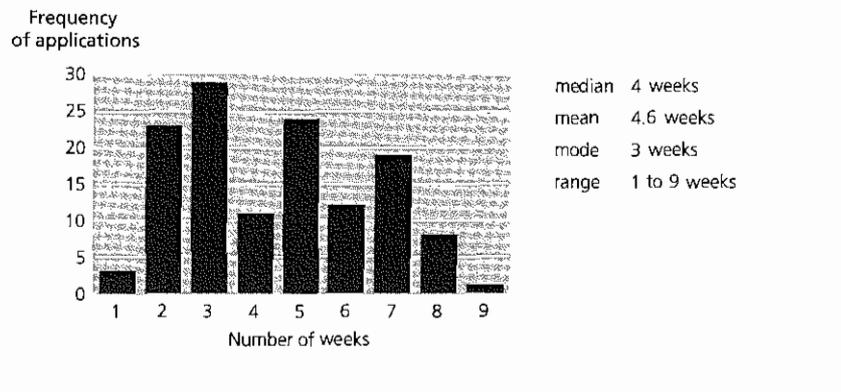


This graph illustrates how the council's income from special uplifts compares with that of other councils nationally and with those in our recognised benchmarking family. Members should note that the council's performance has increased in relative and absolute terms.



When monitoring and communicating information, managers should consider the mean, median, mode and range of performance. These may all paint different pictures about the performance of the service. These differences must be identified and understood if an accurate profile of performance is to be built up. Frequency count diagrams can be useful in analysing these different aspects of performance.

Exhibit 11: Number of weeks taken to process an application



Take the example above. The mean (usually referred to as *average*) turuaround time for an application is 4.6 weeks. While this is statistically correct, it does not paint either a clear picture of past performance or a concise statement of the turnaround time for an application which customers can expect. In reality, the actual performance ranges from 1 to 9 weeks. Secondly, although the median (middle of the range) is 4 weeks, applications are statistically more likely to take 2, 3, 5, 6 or 7 weeks to turn around. Finally, while 3 weeks is the most likely time in which an application will be processed, the majority (57%) take in excess of this. All of this information is important when assessing overall service performance or entering into dialogue about acceptable standards of turnaround time.

Diagrams are most effective when kept simple. For example, three dimensional pie charts may look good in performance reports, but it can often be very difficult to determine at a quick glance what trends are being identified. Similar problems can occur when using comparative bar graphs, where too much information can be contained on the graph for any clear trends to be apparent. In such cases, using more than one diagram may give a far clearer picture.

More advanced diagrammatic techniques are also available to managers. These are particularly useful when undertaking comparative analysis of performance against performance parameters.

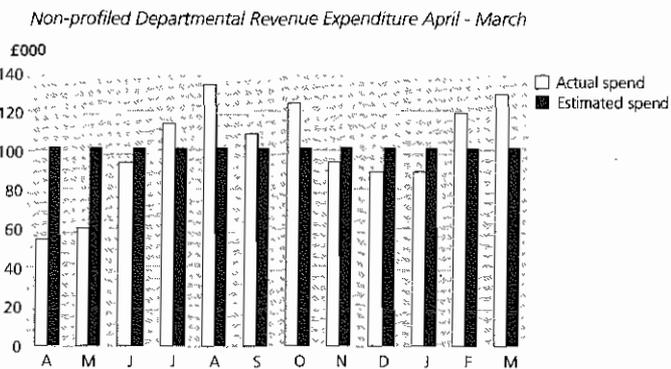
Profiling performance based on past trends

An informed assessment of performance will recognise seasonal peaks and troughs of service uptake or expenditure (where these are known or predictable). Profiling (or modelling) of anticipated performance based on trends evident in previous years is therefore useful in assessing how well things are going.

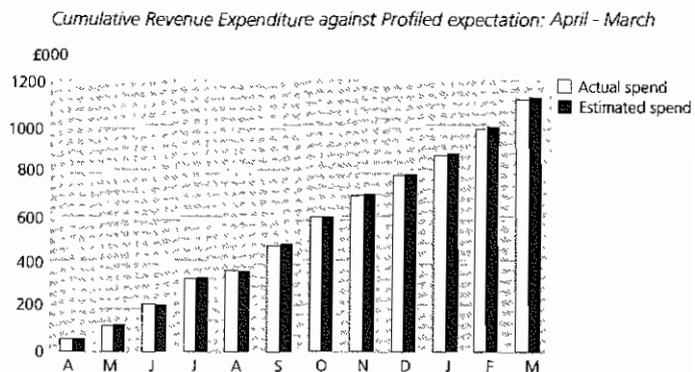
Exhibit 12 illustrates departmental expenditure over financial year 1997/98. The expenditure reported to senior managers in each graph is the same. However, in the first graph, it is difficult to tell whether or not the department is on target to stay within budget. The second graph clearly shows that there has been no major diversion from anticipated expenditure. The information in this graph is both profiled and cumulative. As a result, senior managers can make more accurate judgements on performance over the whole financial year and at any time during it. This can in turn be reported to elected members.

Managers should use their knowledge of the service to profile anticipated trends. The profile may be based on a combination of the assessment of previous performance, similar trends being experienced elsewhere and/or predictions of the implications of service change. In exhibit 12, anticipated expenditure has been profiled by averaging the actual monthly spend in each of the three previous financial years.

Exhibit 12: Non-profiled and profiled information



This graph illustrates departmental revenue expenditure against the estimated budget for 1997/98. Departmental management team should note that the budget has been underspent by approximately 0.8% or £9000. This was due to salary savings accruing against unfilled posts. These posts have now been filled, bringing actual expenditure for 1998/99 back into line with estimated expenditure.



Z charts

The same type of information can also usefully be shown in the form of a Z chart. Consider the data shown in Table A. This shows income from special uplifts on a monthly basis. The 1998/99 data is historic and shows the income achieved in the previous financial year. The refuse collection section has been set a revised financial target of increasing uplift income by 6%. Monthly income targets have been set as shown for the new financial year 1999/2000. This same target data is also shown in cumulative form.

Table A: Income from special uplifts £(000)

Month	Actual 1998/99	New target 1999/2000	Cumulative target 1999/2000
April	4.5	4.7	4.7
May	4.4	4.6	9.3
June	4.7	5	14.3
July	4.6	4.9	19.2
August	5	5.2	24.4
September	4.9	5.2	29.6
October	4.8	5.1	34.7
November	5	5.3	40
December	5.2	5.5	45.5
January	4.8	5.1	50.6
February	4.7	5.1	55.7
March	4.8	5.2	60.9
Total	57.4	60.9	

At the end of each month the authority's Financial Information System would provide details of the actual uplift income that month. Z charts provide managers with a quick and easy way of seeing how this relates to the annual target. The chart comprises four data series:

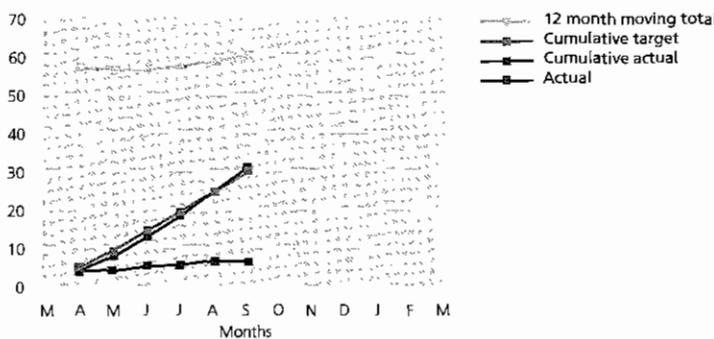
- the cumulative monthly target income (shown in table A)
- the cumulative monthly actual income
- the individual monthly incomes
- a 12 month moving total.

While the first three are self-evident, the last requires clarification. The 12 month moving total will consist of the previous 12 months' actual income figures. It will be rolled forward on a monthly basis regardless of the financial year end. For example, the first 12 month total (57.4) will cover the period April 1998 to March 1999. The next total will cover the period from May 1998 to April 1999; the next from June 1998 to May 1999; and so on. This moving total will always cover the last 12 month period. As a result, it will show the long term trend in service performance.

To illustrate, the following actual income figures for the first 6 months of 1999/2000 are considered. The moving totals are shown in the final column.

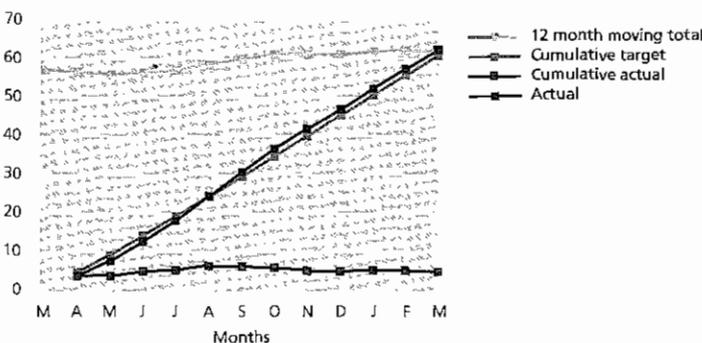
	Actual	Cumulative actual	Cumulative target	12 month moving total
April	3.8	3.8	4.7	56.7
May	3.9	7.7	9.3	56.2
June	5	12.7	14.3	56.5
July	5.3	18	19.2	57.2
August	6.5	24.5	24.4	58.7
September	6.3	30.8	29.6	60.1

Exhibit 13: Z chart of special uplift income (April - September 1999)



The data can be used to produce the Z chart shown in exhibit 13. This single diagram shows several facets of performance at the one time. The actual monthly figures are represented by the bottom line. Progress against the cumulative monthly target is shown by the two lines in the middle. The top line shows the 12 month trend in performance. It shows an initial dip in the first few months followed by a steady rise in trend. Exhibit 14 shows that by the end of the year the three series will have combined to form the shape of the letter Z.

Exhibit 14: Z chart of special uplift income (1999 - 2000)



Z charts are relatively specialised diagrams but extremely effective in those situations where they are applicable.

Radar charts

A radar chart is a useful way of allowing several aspects of performance to be reviewed simultaneously on a single chart. The data below relates to the usage, income generated and level of satisfaction with a swimming pool facility:

	Our facility	Targets
Average number of people per hour using the pool last month	64	52 (national average)
Income as percentage of operating expenditure last month	23%	34% (our facility last year)
Percentage of customers expressing overall satisfaction with the facility last month	81%	90% (agreed target)

The following figures are arrived at by converting actual performance into a percentage of the targets:

Users 123%
 Income 68%
 Satisfaction 90%

The corresponding radar chart is shown in exhibit 15. Each of the three performance measures is given a separate axis and actual performance against that measure is then plotted. The chart allows managers to compare the different dimensions of performance on the same diagram. Exhibit 15 shows that performance is:

- exceeding the target for numbers of users
- almost meeting the target for customer satisfaction
- falling considerably below target for income generation.

Radar charts can also be used to show relative performance for different facilities. Exhibit 16 shows that for two facilities (Meadowfield and Springbrook) levels of satisfaction are fairly similar. It also illustrates that Meadowfield has a higher number of users but a lower level of income generated.

Exhibit 15: Radar chart of swimming pool performance

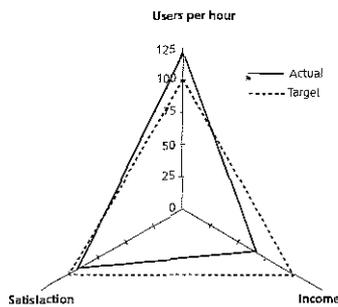
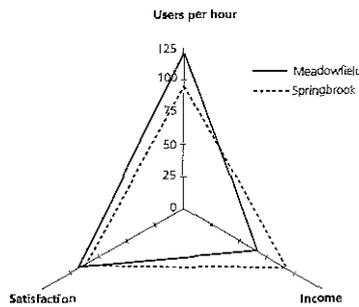


Exhibit 16: Radar chart of comparative performance





Checklist 5: Using diagrams



the diagram effectively communicates the desired message

comparative information on target performance, past performance and performance elsewhere has been included

the performance trend is clearly identifiable from the diagram

performance is concisely explained in accompanying text

all titles, labels, scales and keys have been included in the diagram

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