

Overview & Scrutiny Committees

Dorset County Council



Date of Meeting	10 June 2016
Officer	Chief Executive / Corporate Directors
Subject of Report	Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA) Context Report
Executive Summary	<p>This report provides background and context in relation to Outcomes Based Accountability and the how the council is using this methodology to ensure a clear focus is maintained on those priority outcomes which have been agreed for inclusion in our Corporate Plan.</p> <p>It sets out the key principles of this approach and summarises some of the key features of the OBA methodology.</p> <p>The appendices to this report also include example documentation to help demonstrate to elected members how the OBA methodology can be actively used to support scrutiny work. <i>(NB: - It should be noted that these examples are for illustrative purposes only.)</i></p>
Impact Assessment:	<i>Equalities Impact Assessment:</i> There are no specific issues associated with this report.
	<i>Use of Evidence:</i> Not applicable.
	<i>Budget:</i> No specific cost implications are associated with this report.

	<p><i>Risk Assessment:</i> Having considered the risks associated with this decision using the County Council's approved risk management methodology, the level of risk has been identified as:</p> <p>Current Risk: LOW Residual Risk LOW</p> <hr/> <p><i>Other Implications:</i> None</p>
<p>Recommendation</p>	<p>That the Committee consider and reflect upon the OBA principles and methodology and, through the sample report provided, reflect on how the OBA methodology will be used to provide focused information to support elected members deliver their overview & scrutiny challenge and assurance responsibilities.</p>
<p>Reason for Recommendation</p>	<p>To provide information to assist the council deliver against its corporate plan commitments and to support us in <i>'Working Together for a Strong and Successful Dorset.'</i></p>
<p>Appendices</p>	<p>Appendix A – Sample documentation <i>(Domestic Abuse – Children who are subject to child protection)</i></p>
<p>Background Papers</p>	<p>None</p>
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1. What is Outcomes Based Accountability?

- 1.1 Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA) is a structured approach to thinking, assessing and taking action to improve the life conditions of residents and communities.
- 1.2 It starts from the end result – or outcome – and works backwards to identify those actions that actually make a difference. In other words we work from ‘Ends’, backwards to clearly identify the ‘Means’ that have got us there and assess whether the resultant outcome is good, bad or indifferent.
- 1.3 It is designed to get from ‘talk to action’ as quickly, as the methodology actively encourages appropriate, timely, evidence based action to deliver improvement.
- 1.4 It works well if done by directly involving those that have a role to play in improving the outcome. It therefore starts by getting colleagues and partners talking about a particular problem and discussing the ‘causes and forces’ at work behind the issue. Once these are properly understood clear actions can then be agreed and assigned to help tackle and address any gaps.
- 1.5 OBA tries to use plain language and common sense methods that everyone can understand.

2. So how does OBA work?

- 2.1 Firstly we identify which ‘life condition’ we are actively seeking to assess and, if necessary, improve – in doing so we establish a clear focus on a specific ‘outcome’.
- 2.2 Dorset County Council has articulated those priority ‘life conditions (outcomes)’ that we believe are important in our Corporate Plan. These are set out under our four key outcomes SAFE; HEALTHY; INDEPENDENT; and PROSPEROUS.
- 2.3 An example from our Corporate Plan would be that ‘People in Dorset are SAFE’. Within this outcome the council has agreed that we are committed to ensuring that:
 - Children and vulnerable adults are safe wherever they are;
 - Crime, antisocial behaviour and domestic abuse across Dorset is minimised;
 - There are fewer accidental injuries and deaths – including those on Dorset’s roads.
 - People and communities are better able to cope with environmental change and other emergencies.
- 2.4 In seeking to assess whether we are achieving these, we would select a particular aspect, and we would then select some trends – these are called:
 - i) **Population Indicators** – *A measure that helps quantify the achievement of an outcome. Indicators answer the question “How would we recognise this result if we fell over it?”*
(E.g. The crime rate helps to quantify whether we are living in a safe community).
 - ii) **Performance Measures** – *A measure of how well a programme, organisation or service is working*
(E.g. The percentage of crimes that have been solved).

- 2.5 We can then take the most important indicators and measures to understand the reasons why the current situation is as it is.
- 2.6 We identify who should play a role in making a difference and then decide what action to take to improve the outcome.
- 2.7 Significantly this enables the County Council to take an objective view of its own contribution and performance and thus assess what specific improvement(s) it could make. This is either through aspects of its own of service delivery, or through its influence with others.
- 2.8 We can then analyse to try to find out those things that are contributing to the current situation, identify who should play a part in improving the situation and decide what action should be taken to make a difference.

3. What questions do we need to ask?

- 3.1 OBA takes a structured approach to ensure focus, clarity and objectivity is maintained during the assessment process.
- 3.2 In seeking to assess the current situation we must first consider outcomes at the at 'population' level. This stage uses seven specific questions, normally referred to as 'The 7 Population Accountability Questions'. These are as follows;
 - 1. What are the quality of life conditions we want for our children, adults and families who live in our community?
 - 2. What would these conditions look like if we could see them?
 - 3. How can we measure these conditions?
 - 4. How are we doing with the most important of these measures?
 - 5. Who are the partners that have a role to play in doing better?
 - 6. What works to do better, including no-cost and low-cost ideas?
 - 7. What do we propose to do?
- 3.3 In assessing 'population outcomes' we also need to be clear that the council will not have sole accountability for outcomes. For example, if we again consider the example of seeking a reduction in crime. Responsibility for this is also shared by others as it requires local people, partners and partnerships (e.g. the Community Safety Partnership) to come together to bear down over time on the causes of crime. *(This is reflected by question 5.)*
- 3.4 Having reflected on the answers to these 7 population accountability questions we are better able to understand the current situation and assess where any challenges may be.
- 3.5 Then in order to assess whether we as a county council are in a position to be able to influence and hopefully improve these outcomes, we can then also drill down further to look at the 'performance accountability' level.
- 3.6 Whilst 'The 7 Performance Accountability Questions' are similar, as can be seen, these specifically look to assess the council's own contribution:
 - 1. Who are our clients / customers?
 - 2. How can we measure if they are better off?
 - 3. How can we measure if we are delivering services well?

4. How are we doing on the most important of these measures?
 5. Who are the partners that have a role to play in doing better?
 6. What works to do better including no-cost and low-cost ideas?
 7. What do we propose to do?
- 3.7 This provides us with a clear indication of what impact we are having on the outcome and what we are doing to change the behaviour, attitude, knowledge, skills or circumstances of clients or a group of people.
- 3.8 At this stage the OBA methodology also allows us to use and apply information we have gleaned to actively look to influence the outcomes. This is known as 'Turning the Curve', which seeks measurable improvement and moves us from 'Talk to Action' i.e. What are we actually going to do to deliver better outcomes?
- 3.9 This aspect of the process is similarly supported through a structured assessment process, which again is organised around seven key questions. We refer to these as 'The 7 Killer Questions':
1. If we do nothing where is the trend heading, is this OK?
 2. What's helping and hindering the trend ('causes and forces')?
 3. Are local service sand partnership working making a difference and providing value for money?
 4. What additional information / research do we need to properly understand the 'causes and forces'?
 5. Who are the key partners we need to be working with (including local residents)?
 6. What could work to turn the trend in the right direction, including 'low cost and no cost solutions'? Additional information/research around 'what works'?
 7. What is the Council's and Members role and specific contribution?
- 3.10 To be effective turning the curve exercises need to be clear on their purpose, properly scoped and carried out in accordance with a strict time limit. Routinely only 55 minutes is allocated. This is to ensure that the discussions remain focused and lead to the identification of clear actions, which are agreed and allocated to lead individuals to ensure clear ownership and accountability.
- 3.11 These help to inform us whether our own contribution is effective and/or whether improvements could be achieved and, if so, which aspects of our work could deliver these.
- 3.12 The process supports the council to reach clear conclusions and recommendations for change, focusing on priority outcomes and monitoring and evidencing progress towards those desired outcomes.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 The County Council has adopted the OBA approach to help ensure we maintain a clear focus on the priority outcomes (life conditions) for the residents and communities we serve, constantly striving to do better.
- 4.2 Appendix A provides an example committee scrutiny scoping document and report, which has been included for illustrative purposes only.
- 4.3 The particular example relates to one of the council's corporate plan stated outcomes that Dorset People are SAFE. It considers Domestic Abuse and specifically reviews

the 'rate of children subject to child protection where domestic abuse is a feature'.

- 4.4 This example document has been specifically drafted to help to demonstrate how the OBA approach could be used to support the work of all of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees in scrutinising progress against delivery of those priority outcomes contained in our Corporate Plan.

Debbie Ward
Chief Executive
June 2016