

JSNA – the time has come!

Thursday 10 January 2008

Christmas is over; the new year is upon us, and with it the series of duties and measures representing the new relationship between central and local government are now rapidly coming in to play.

“2008 will be a watershed year for Britain’s local democracy. It is the year in which the mature relationship between central and local government, debated for so long, and promised in the White Paper ‘Strong and Prosperous Communities’ becomes reality” (Hazel Blears, Foreword to draft Statutory Guidance¹)

From June 2008, the policy and practice focus of all (150) upper tier local authorities will be directed by a new-style Local Area Agreement, based on a set of locally agreed priorities and targets rooted in a local Sustainable Community Strategy, the purpose of which is *“to set the overall strategic direction and long-term vision for the economic, social and environmental well-being of a local area – typically 10 to 20 years – in a way that contributes to sustainable development in the UK. It tells the ‘story of the place’ – the distinctive vision and ambition of the area, backed by clear evidence and analysis”*²

The Sustainable Community Strategy is itself informed, for the health and well being dimension, by the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for Health and Social Care (JSNA). Crucially, the JSNA should provide a robust analysis and projection of the health and social care needs of the whole of the local population to underpin the strategic direction and commissioning plans for health and social care in both the medium and the longer term, and the selection of the LAA priorities and targets.

The development of the JSNA is the joint responsibility of the Director of Public Health, the Director of Adult Social Services and the Director of Children’s Services, and becomes mandatory from 1 April 2008. PCTs are also required to publish the results of the JSNA in their prospectus, alongside the results of their public engagement and their strategic commissioning priorities.³

The recently published Department of Health guidance on Joint Strategic Needs Assessment⁴ strongly echoes these expectations and requirements. It emphasises the essential requirement for a full understanding of the current and future health and well-being needs of the whole population, and evidence that the direction of Local Area Agreements and the substance of commissioning intentions have been informed by this understanding - affirming that *‘needs assessment is an essential tool for commissioners to inform service planning and commissioning strategies’*, and that *‘JSNA is a tool to identify groups where needs are not being met and that are experiencing poor outcomes’*⁵.

With such ambitious intentions pinned to it, the guidance is, however, disappointing in terms of how you translate the vision of JSNA into practice – or move on from the “what” to the

¹ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/statutoryguidance>

² *ibid*

³ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/620628>

⁴ http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_081097

⁵ *ibid*

“how”. In particular, there is very little to help people progress from a general gathering of data to its use in informing a truly strategic (in terms of both of whole population coverage and future direction) vision for commissioning. As far as social care is concerned, the content of the draft core dataset is similarly disappointing. It is difficult to conceive how a knowledge simply of the total numbers of social care clients currently receiving a publicly-funded service, and how many of those are supported in the community, can provide a sound basis for projecting the shape and extent of the future social care needs of the whole population. Worryingly, it would appear to vindicate the very basis that councils are being exhorted to move away from – of developing future commissioning intentions purely on the basis of current patterns of council-funded services.

There are, however, other sources of help! In particular, the Care Services Efficiency Delivery (CSED) programme within the Department of Health has published a series of methodology briefings (including one on Planning4care), covering a range of tools and techniques to help authorities to forecast demand, plan capacity and develop commissioning plans⁶.

Population needs assessment has traditionally been the domain of public health . The joint responsibility between the Director of Public Health, the Director of Adult Social Services and the Director of Children’s Services for this agenda is a welcome development. Local authority managers and elected members may need to develop confidence and skills in taking this task forward and using it creatively for developing the future of social care. This is an opportunity for ambitious and sustainable forward planning – let us hope it does not just become another paper exercise.

Planning4care

About Planning4care:

Planning4care provides the essential analysis for the social care element of Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for older people. It is a hands-on dynamic tool providing local analysis of changing needs and the implications for services and costs.

For further information about Planning4care, please visit our website at www.planning4care.org.uk

⁶ <http://www.csed.csip.org.uk/workstreams/demand-forecasting-capacity-planning/methodology-briefing-papers.html>