

# Driving performance in a multi-agency partnership using outcome measures: a case study

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## Summary

**Purpose** – This paper aims to present the rationale for the adoption of a performance measurement approach within a partnership setting, the process followed to develop a multi-agency performance measurement framework, the resulting model and the associated challenges and key success factors.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This paper used a case study approach.

**Findings** – This paper describes the multi-agency outcomes-based performance measurement model used by Children's Services Planning in Northern Ireland to monitor agreed outcomes and identifies the key success factors of developing and implementing such a model.

**Research limitations/implications** – Findings are limited to the analysis of the development of a performance measurement approach within a single partnership.

**Originality/value** – This paper has contributed to the debate on performance measurement by illustrating a paradigm shift from collecting activity data on an organization by organization basis to managing information on a multi-agency basis using indicators based on outcomes as part of an integrated performance measurement system.

**Keywords** Performance measurement (quality), Partnership, Personal health, Social care

**Paper type** Case study

## Introduction

Performance measurement which Neely *et al.* (2002) define “as the process of quantifying the efficiency and effectiveness of past action” is usually discussed within the context of a single organization. In this paper the development of a performance measurement framework within the context of a multi-agency partnership is analysed. The aim of the paper is to present the rationale for the adoption of a performance measurement approach within the partnership, the process followed to develop a multi-agency performance measurement framework, the resulting model and the associated challenges and key success factors.

## Background and context

### *Collaboration and partnership working*

Sullivan and Skelcher (2002, p. 1) argue that “globally, partnership is the new language of public governance.” The emergence of partnership working in the past decade reflects a desire to move from the development of policy and the planning and delivery of services within fragmented organizational and professional silos to an integrated, multi-sectoral and multi-professional approach which will deliver improvements in outcomes. Following the election of the Labour government in 1997 the emphasis on collaboration, breaking down organizational and professional boundaries and the desire for social inclusion gained momentum across the public sector.

Percy-Smith (2005) demonstrates how this wider movement for better joining-up of policy and services has been a key theme running through recent policy developments in relation

to children and young people. Percy-Smith (2005, pp. 1-13) argues that since 1997 issues in relation to children and young people have moved higher up the political agenda with a growing recognition of the need for innovative approaches to the delivery of services that cross traditional service and professional boundaries. Key aspects of recent initiatives (e.g. *Department for Education and Skills, 2003* and the subsequent *Children Act, 2004*) are a strengthening of the requirement for partnership working, multi-disciplinary teams and integrated services to improve (shared) outcomes for children and young people. This is in response to high profile failures of the organization and delivery of services for children and young people as well as the fragmentation of services at both local and national levels.

### *Children's services planning in the Southern Board Area*

The Southern Health and Social Services Board (SHSSB) is one of four Health and Social Services Boards in Northern Ireland responsible for commissioning and planning health and social services on behalf of its local population. The Board works in partnership with Trusts, statutory, private and voluntary bodies, and agencies to deliver improved health and social care for the population it serves (circa 320,000). SHSSB has responsibility for leading or participating in a wide range of interagency/intersectoral partnerships.

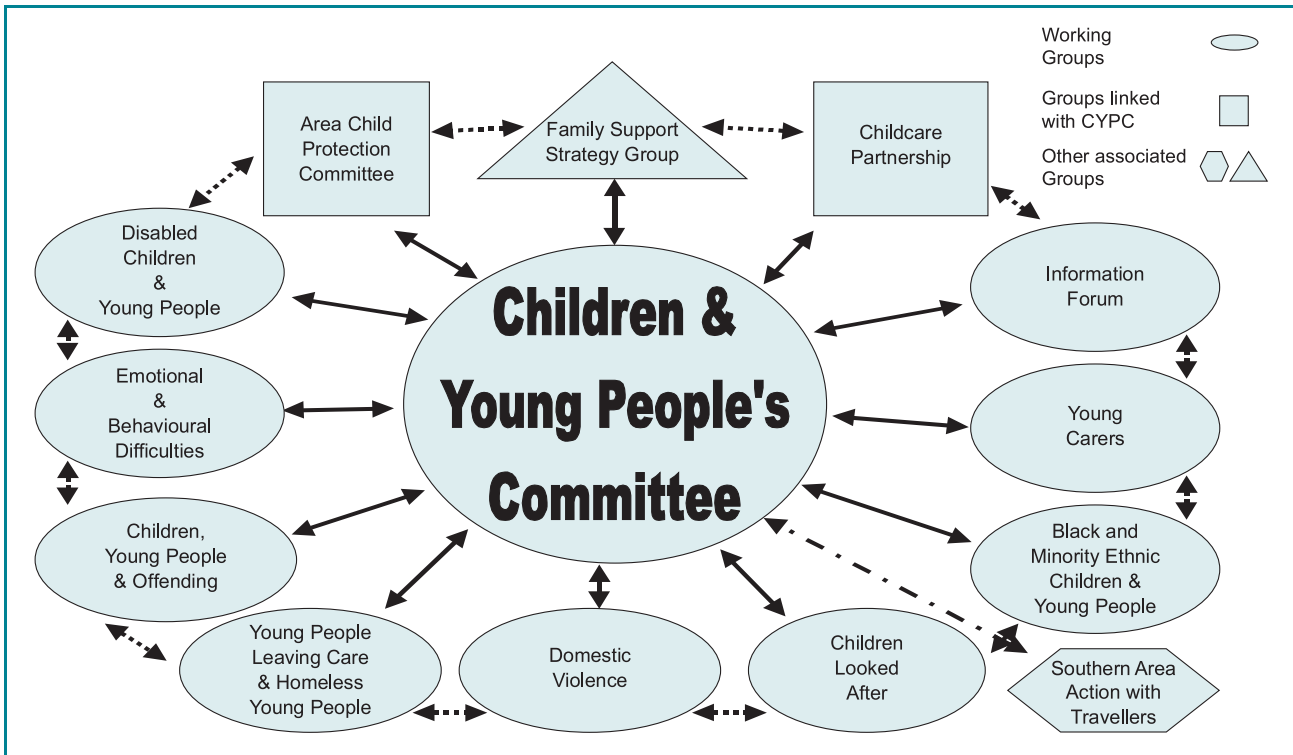
SHSSB is responsible for leading the Southern Area Children's Services Planning (CSP) multi-agency partnership. Godfrey (2003) provides a detailed overview of the key policy and legislative drivers which led to Children's Services Plans becoming mandatory in Northern Ireland in July 1998. The "challenge inherent in Children's Services Planning is to develop a multi-agency and multi-disciplinary strategic plan for vulnerable children and young people" (Godfrey, 2003, p. 185). Thus every three years each Health and Social Services Board publishes a Children's Services Plan which sets out how the Board will co-operate with other statutory, voluntary and community organizations to meet the needs of vulnerable children and young people in its area. Plans have been produced for the periods 1999-2002 (SHSSB, 1999), 2002-2005 (SHSSB, 2002a, b) and 2005-2008 (SHSSB, 2005a, b). In addition an annual review is published which sets out what progress has been made in terms of the development of the planning process and in meeting the needs of particular groups of children and young people with specific needs. The goal of the partnership is to achieve co-ordinated planning to meet the needs of children and young people who are vulnerable, so that they can reach their full potential and be socially included members of the community, as children and adults.

Figure 1 shows the partnership's planning structure and the inter-relationships between the key groups.

The Children and Young People's Committee (CYPC) provides strategic direction to the partnership and consists of representatives from each partner agency, the voluntary, community and ethnic minority sectors. There are eight Working Groups which are multi-agency and carry out the detailed planning in particular areas. An Interagency Information Forum exists to ensure that performance information is used to support the partnership's strategic planning process. The Southern Area Child Protection Committee – responsible for the co-ordination of inter-agency child protection – and the Southern Area Childcare Partnership – a multi-agency forum working in childcare and family support with children aged 0-14 years and their families – now feed into the CYPC. In addition the Family Support Strategy Group - tasked with developing an integrated family support strategy and co-ordination of the work of other groups in this area – and the Southern Area Action with Travelers (SAAT) partnership – which aims to help improve health, accommodation and educational status of the Traveling community – now form part of the overall CSP structure.

The 2005-2008 CSP Plan (2005, p. 10) is based on nine key high level outcomes – "statements of common purpose, of aspiration and intent" – developed jointly across the four CYPC's in Northern Ireland (e.g. "All children and young people have a stable upbringing"). The overall aim is to improve the well-being of vulnerable children and young people which will be achieved by each agency contributing to the delivery of the agreed outcomes. Progress in delivering on the outcomes will be measured by the development of a multi-agency cluster of key statistical indicators. Since the publication of the CSP Plan, the new ten year NI Children's Strategy – *Our Children and Young People – Our Pledge* (2006) – was launched on the 20 June 2006 by the Minister for Children and Young People in Northern

**Figure 1** Children's services planning structure



Ireland. This strategy also focuses on an outcomes approach tying in with the work that CSP has been pioneering.

### Why did CSP want to measure performance?

Prior to the implementation of CSP, services for children and young adults were planned and delivered in isolation by disparate statutory, voluntary and community bodies and agencies. However, it was more than likely that a vulnerable child receiving services from health and social care would also be in receipt of services from other agencies such as the police, court service, housing etc.. The underpinning aim of CSP was to address what was perceived to be a planning deficit. This would involve moving to a position where the planning and delivery of services on the ground would be designed around the holistic needs and rights of children and young people rather than in terms of professional or organizational silos (what McTernan and Godfrey (2006, p. 220) call "a whole system planning approach").

The delivery of services by stand-alone agencies operating in isolation from one another also meant that information was being collected separately by each of the agencies. This in turn resulted in information feeding a limited, organization-specific view of the child's needs and service provision. The focus of information collection was also based on activity/service inputs and was not necessarily meaningful or used to inform decisions in relation to the needs of vulnerable children and young people. In the context of the development of CSP this silo-based approach to information and analysis could not support a collaborative, integrated model of service planning and commissioning.

The aim was therefore to develop a comprehensive information service to support Children's Services Planning. In order to achieve this aim collaborative working was established to identify and define routine information collected by each agency and to agree a common and consistent approach to the definition, compatibility, reporting and management of information. Furthermore, one of the key objectives was to identify new measurable indicators that could be used to assess the needs of children and young people. This involved a paradigm shift from collecting activity data on an organization by organization

basis to managing information on a multi-agency basis using indicators based on outcomes as part of an integrated performance measurement system.

Interest in performance management in the public sector began to emerge in the 1980s and 1990s as a tool for the government to demonstrate the delivery of its modernization program to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, quality and value for money of services delivered to the citizen (Cranfield School of Management, 2004). Thinking on performance measurement within Children's Services Planning was influenced by this wider context, but more specifically by the work of Cornelius ("Con") Hogan in Vermont (Hogan, 2001 and Hogan and Murphey, 2002) and the application of Hogan's ideas and approach by Mike Pinnock in North Lincolnshire (Pinnock, 2002). Hogan's (2001) concept of "results-based accountability" is formulated in terms of shared ownership of an "outcomes-and-indicator framework" operating across programs and based upon mutual responsibility and a widely agreed-upon common purpose i.e. "well-being for families and communities" (Hogan and Murphey, 2002). Con Hogan's thinking continues to influence the work of the partnership and he has been a regular contributor to workshops and conferences organized by CSP.

## The evolution of the performance measurement framework

The evolution of the multi-agency outcomes-based performance measurement framework can be broken down into the following five iterative phases.

### *Phase 1 – establishing networks*

In order to support the information needs of Children's Services Planning within the SHSSB, it was important to develop and establish a comprehensive information service through collaborative working across key agencies. It was essential therefore to identify who the key partners would be in relation to joint planning of services for children and young people, and to look at the "whole child" and in particular needs based information.

An information workshop was organized in April 1999, with information representatives from key agencies invited to identify possible ways forward in establishing a joint multi-agency information service. The following recommendations were agreed at the workshop:

- establish a multi-agency information forum;
- identify baseline information currently collected by each agency;
- work towards sharing and exchanging information based on agreed protocols; and
- establish a corporate database of multi-agency information.

### *Phase 2 – establishing a multi-agency information forum*

The first meeting of the Southern Area Children's Services Planning Multi-Agency Information Forum took place in October 1999 at which membership, remit, objectives, audit and sharing of information within the Forum were discussed. The jointly agreed aim was "to provide a multi-agency forum to discuss, identify and establish common information to support the objectives of the Children's Services Planning process".

The Forum has since established protocols for the collection, sharing, exchanging and use of multi-agency information with members striving towards commonality and compatibility of information across agencies.

The group also worked towards identifying and examining current baseline information that each agency had available that would meet CSP requirements, identifying any gaps and exploring ways of accessing, upgrading and utilizing new information.

When all of the information was collected about the needs of local children and young people, it was collated into one source document called a Needs Indicator Profile (Southern Health and Social Services Board, 2002a, b, 2003, 2004, 2005a, b and 2006). The information contained within the profile is based on both routinely collected information held by agencies as well as information being collected as a result of performance indicators and outcomes set by CSP Working Groups. The profiles are now produced on an annual basis, and are available from April 2000 through to March 2005.

### *Phase 3 – deciding on the measures*

Each Children's Services Planning Working Group has decided what it wishes to see change as a result of assessing the local needs of particular groups of vulnerable children and young people. This has given the Children's Services Planning process a set of outcomes it needs to achieve that will make a real difference to children's lives. Each working group has also worked out measures or performance indicators designed to show the extent to which the outcomes have been achieved.

The importance of this approach is that it ensures that those planning services are "outcome focused", that is, every agency's work is aimed at improving shared outcomes for children.

Identifying feeder indicators to measure each outcome is a key process in developing an effective and workable outcomes, indicator and information framework. Therefore good data collection from all of the agencies involved in Children's Services Planning is essential to effectively manage such a framework. Each agency can make a contribution to a holistic statistical profile that describes the overall state of health and well being of all our children and young people.

### *Phase 4 – development of the information infrastructure*

A significant part of Children's Services Planning is the development of a comprehensive Information Infrastructure to support the planning and commissioning and outcome monitoring of children's services in collaboration with key agencies. The Children and Young People's Committees across Northern Ireland have identified key areas of work in respect of vulnerable children, young people and their families and have established multi-disciplinary/agency Working Groups to address their needs.

In order to provide the foundations for a strategic approach to Children's Services Planning, the SHSSB, through collaborative work with key agencies and organizations across Northern Ireland and on a cross-border basis, has:

- identified and defined routine information collected on Children and Young People by each key agency involved in Children's Services Planning and established multi-disciplinary and multi-agency based information sources at electoral ward level;
- established an Interagency Information Forum, made up of key information personnel, to look at information relating to children and young people across all agencies, and agree a common and consistent approach to the definition, compatibility, reporting and management of information relating to children's services throughout the SHSSB area;
- identified via the Forum new indicators of need and undertaken analysis of comparative data to support social inclusion and needs assessment;
- developed a central corporate database for the collation, maintenance, measurement and dissemination of data to meet agreed information requirements and ensure accessibility, user friendliness and security to all involved;
- built on the meaningfulness, accuracy and relevancy of existing information through the use sophisticated analysis techniques to study local areas of identified need through use of the Geographical Information (Mapping) System;
- carried out a number of thorough analyses of need, demand and supply and ascertained the views of service users and local communities;
- developed and maintained a comprehensive CSP website that offers local profiles of information as well as family support information directly to families, children and young people and professionals ([www.southernareacsp.n-i.nhs.uk](http://www.southernareacsp.n-i.nhs.uk)); and
- mapped out a detailed outcomes, indicator and information framework identifying high level outcomes, feeder indicators and information flows to measure indicators for all Working Groups. It also identifies links to children's rights as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).



### *Phase 5 – developing the performance measurement framework regionally*

As indicators are most effective when comparable from place to place, a regional Children's Services Planning information Group has been established to identify, share and adhere to a consistent approach to information collection from regional agencies such as the Department of Education, Northern Ireland Housing Executive and Police Service for Northern Ireland.

Also the SHSSB is a key player in a cross-border Children's Services Planning and Information Project and is currently involved in setting up a cross border web based GIS system for monitoring children's services and for promoting an outcomes based approach to joint planning and commissioning of services.

### **Findings and outcomes**

This section presents the main findings from the development of a multi-agency outcomes-based performance measurement framework in terms of the performance model used by the partnership and the key success factors of developing and implementing such a model. The model is also illustrated by reference to performance information collected for the Child and Parent Support (CAPS) project.

#### *The performance model*

The multi-agency outcomes-based performance model represents a continuous, iterative process and may be broken down into the following components:

*Identification of outcomes.* The first step in the process is the development of outcome statements. However, these are not expressed as statistical targets, but as statements of common purpose, of aspiration and intent. CSP has adopted nine outcome statements, for example, "All children and families live in safe, supportive communities".

*Definition of associated life factors and measurable indicators.* A hierarchy of life factors, indicators and measures are developed associated with each of the nine outcome statements. Examples of life factors that relate to the above outcome statement are crime, death or injury, housing/environment, play/leisure and perception. These in turn are broken down into measurable indicators.

*Data collection, analysis and reporting.* Data are based solely on the measurable indicators and is collected across all of the agencies involved in the CSP process. This data is returned to a central point to be collated and analyzed to provide a cumulative annual overview of progress towards outcome statements. These results are presented as an annual composite management report for use by each of the Working Groups and CYPC.

*Review of achievements against outcomes, identification of areas for improvement and action planning.* The Working Groups and CYPC use the annual management report as a performance management tool to critically review progress against outcomes and to develop strategies for improvement and associated action plans. This may lead to the review of measurable indicators associated with outcome statements and life factors.

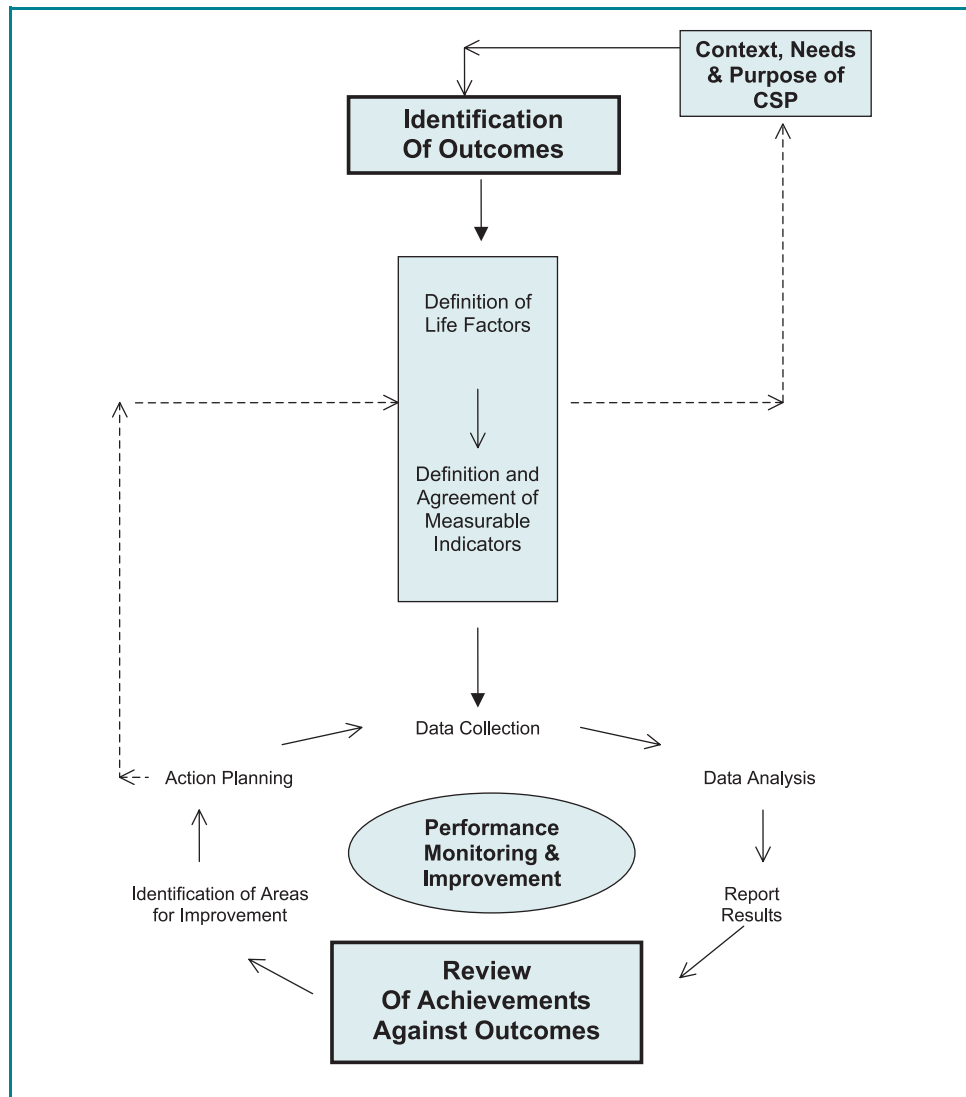
The performance model is illustrated as a cyclic process in Figure 2.

#### *Child and Parent Support (CAPS)*

Child and Parent Support (CAPS) was a new initiative in the SHSSB area developed by the Children, Young People and Offending Working Group to provide support services for children (aged 8-11 years) who are at risk of engaging in anti-social/offending behavior. The Child and Parent Support Project (CAPS) is the first of its kind for young people in this age group.

CAPS was developed in response to local research which highlighted the significant number of younger children being brought to police attention for activities that would constitute an offence in older children. Funding for a pilot was secured for a period of three years until October 2006 to establish an innovative scheme in the SHSSB area which would provide a range of support services to children at risk of offending and their families. Its objectives are:

**Figure 2** Multi-agency outcomes-based performance model

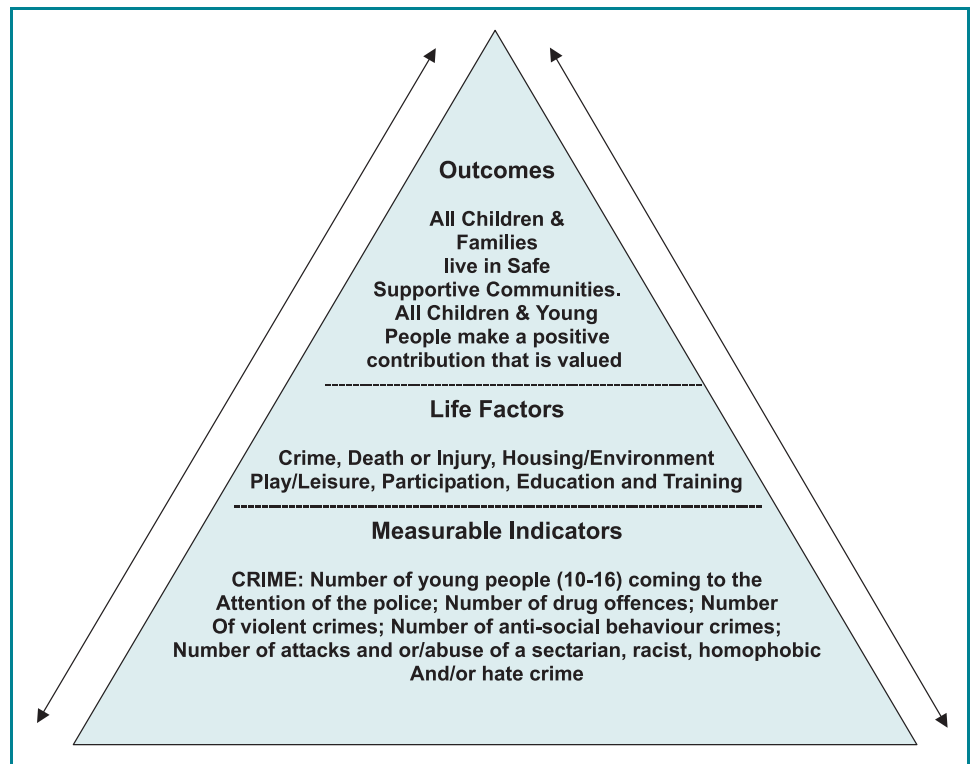


- to provide early planned intervention to children at risk of offending;
- to support children in need;
- to provide family support;
- help build positive lives and life experiences for children and their families;
- promote social inclusion; and
- work in partnership with the relevant statutory and voluntary agencies to provide a holistic service for children and their families.

The project takes referrals from a range of agencies involved with children and young people and support is provided to children and their families in their home, school and community environment and programs are tailored in response to identified need. To date CAPS has supported, or is currently engaged in supporting, services to almost 50 individual children and parents/carers throughout the Southern Health and Social Services Board area.

The performance management process within the CAPS initiative is set out as a three tier system. This is illustrated diagrammatically in Figure 3 using the “crime” life factor as an example:

**Figure 3** CAPS performance management process



On the top layer are the overall outcomes that the project wants to achieve for its vulnerable children and young people. The middle layer then defines which life factors are related on a multi-agency basis to these overall outcomes. The third layer identifies the individual indicators needed to measure performance.

Examples of other indicators are:

- *Death or injury*: number of child deaths due to accidents; number of A&E attendances due to road traffic accidents; accidents in the home/community.
- *Housing/environment*: number of children living in overcrowded conditions; percentage of children who live in an area of poor access; number of children waiting for an adaptation to their home due to disability access.

### **Challenges and key success factors (KSFs)**

Developing and implementing a performance measurement approach within a partnership setting represents a continuous journey with many challenges and rewards along the way.

The primary challenge faced by a partnership in developing performance indicators is the need to gain the commitment of individuals and agencies as well as ensuring that key players have an understanding of their role, responsibility and authority to act on behalf of the agency they represent. This is an ongoing issue which requires a continual focus on the management of relationships and reinforcement of the importance of performance measurement in assisting the partnership in delivering on its goals.

Some of the significant early challenges emanated from the new approach to information and performance measurement to be adopted across different, separate agencies. For example, different agencies were working to diverse timeframes in data collection (financial year vs calendar year vs school year), different definitions and terminology were in use and initially there were fears about sharing information with other agencies. These difficulties were overcome through the harmonization of timeframes and development of agreed protocols for monitoring the required information (with tolerances for exceptions), working



together to agree consistency and compatibility of currencies and definitions and overcoming fears by influencing through the senior management teams of each agency as well as building trust with agencies about the confidential, anonymised use of their information.

As well as addressing these fundamental issues it was also essential in the early stages of the partnership that an understanding of the concept and potential application of a performance measurement approach was understood by all key stakeholders, planners and information staff. This was achieved through the delivery of an intensive training program on a multi-agency basis in which staff from the different agencies were trained together. Central to this learning process was a clear recognition that there needed to be a change of focus from information collected on services which was activity-based to outcome-based indicators.

The delivery of a performance measurement approach within the partnership is heavily dependant on the availability of a dedicated information resource and expertise to drive and co-ordinate the whole process. Furthermore, tools must be in place to effectively disseminate, access and present information using, for example, web-based and GIS applications.

Of course gaps in indicators will always exist as information is not always readily available to support meaningful indicators. For example, there may be a reliance on information from surveys which by its very nature is out-of-date or use of information because it is currently available and the closest match as a measure of an indicator. Compromise is therefore inevitable in some instances until such times as it is possible to develop more appropriate and meaningful information flows.

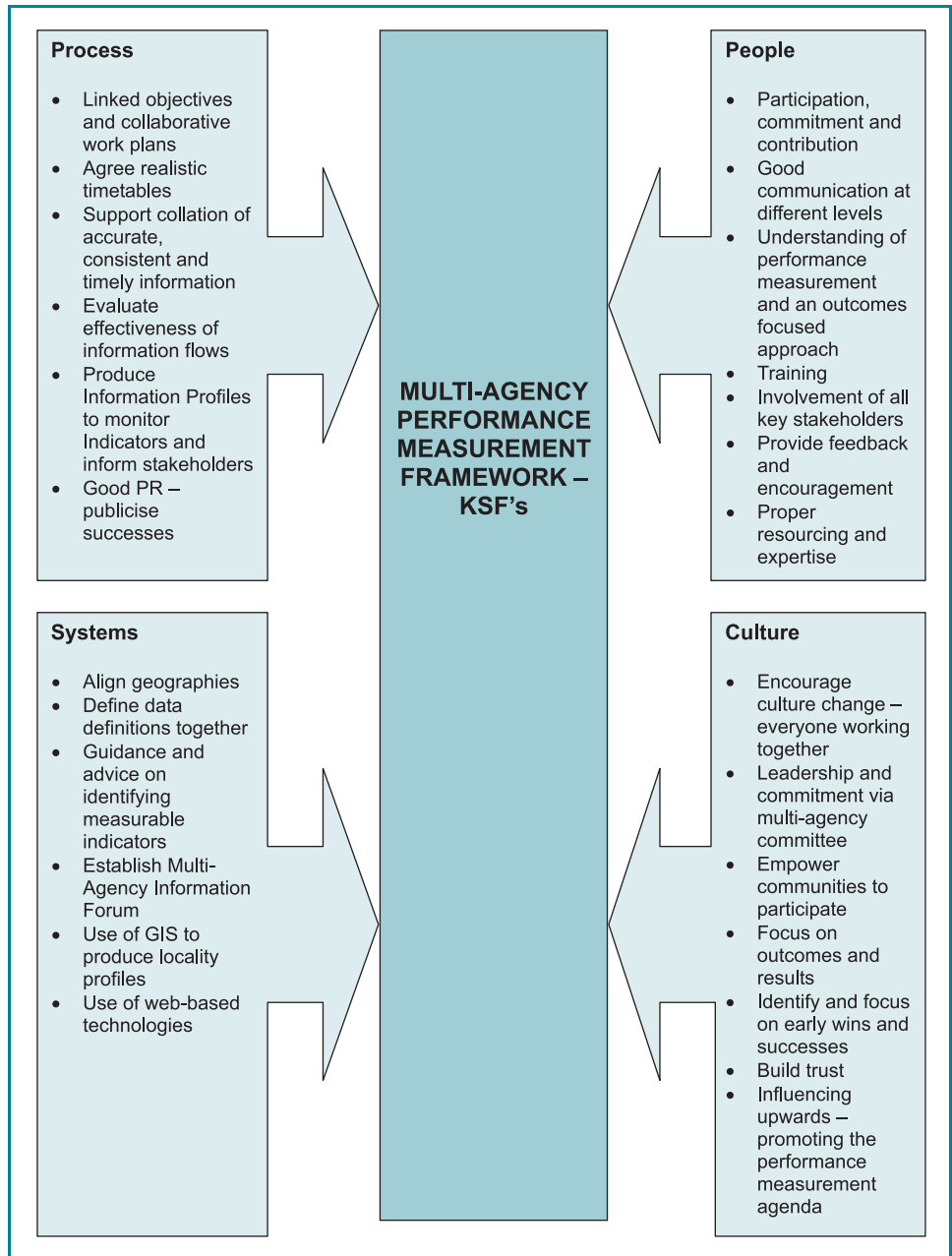
At a more strategic level CSP has been concerned to influence upwards so that government departments adopt an outcomes-based approach to planning services for children and young people, that this is cross-departmental and that each department supports their agencies in multi-agency working. This type of influencing has been successful as reflected in the ten year NI Children's Strategy, but more work is required in influencing the use of more meaningful indicators to measure outcomes. Equally policy makers and planners need to build into an outcomes-based approach consideration of what is to be measured from the very beginning of the process, define measures in terms of meaningfulness rather than on what information is currently available and focus on a balanced suite of measures.

These challenges and how they were overcome has informed the identification of key success factors (and by implication the associated barriers) to the development of a multi-agency performance measurement framework. Figure 4 summarizes these KSF's under the headings of Process, People, Culture and Systems.

## Conclusion

It is widely acknowledged that working in partnership is difficult (Huxham and Vangen, 2005, Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002, Percy-Smith, 2005) and that achieving results is unlikely. This complexity, the barriers to success, the involvement of multiple stakeholders and the need for accountability are all key drivers for the use of a robust approach to performance measurement by a partnership. Furthermore, the critical question for a partnership (Atkinson, 2005) is the extent to which it has added value and achieved a greater impact than would have been achieved without its existence. However, determining the impact of the partnership is a problematic exercise as it necessitates the establishment of causal links between the interventions it has made and the perceived resulting outcomes. The contribution of an integrated performance measurement system using indicators based on outcomes is that it is a significant component of any evaluation of the impact of a partnership. In addition to demonstrating achievements, performance measurement also creates value and is integral to the operation of a partnership by acting as a tool to ensure a clear focus on shared objectives/outcomes, challenge and improve performance, review resource allocation, improve decision making and provide the basis for learning and development.

**Figure 4** Key success factors (KSF's)



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