

Moray Citizens' Panel
Public Performance Reporting Consultation

Draft Report

by

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1. INTRODUCTION

Background

- 1.1. Since 1993/94 all Scottish local authorities have been under a statutory duty to provide information on the performance of their services. In addition, the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 gives all local authorities a duty to secure best value through continued improvement in the performance of their services, and to maintain a Community Planning process.
- 1.2. Within this framework, the Accounts Commission has a statutory obligation to specify information which local authorities must publish on their performance. The Commission does this through the specification of statutory performance indicators, on which local authorities are required to report locally. The range of indicators is reviewed each year; in 2005/06 there were 70+ indicators across 10 broad service areas.
- 1.3. These performance indicators form the minimum “core” of performance information which local authorities report, and are intended to fit within broader performance reporting arrangements which are set by each local authority. Similarly, while it is made clear that performance reporting arrangements should provide information in a way which is meaningful to the public, local authorities are able to specify exactly **how** they communicate their performance information.

Research Objectives and Methodology

- 1.4. As part of an ongoing review of their performance reporting arrangements The Moray Council commissioned Craigforth - who currently manage the Moray Citizens' Panel - to seek the views of a sample of Panel members through a series of focus groups.
- 1.5. In particular, the Council wished to gather information on Panel members' awareness of current Council performance reporting, views on the range of information being reported and the most appropriate methods for delivering meaningful performance information. The discussion schedule used in conducting the groups is included as an appendix to this report.
- 1.6. A range of performance reports were circulated at the focus groups, to give participants a clearer idea of the kind of information currently reported and to prompt discussion on the preferred format of reporting. These reports were:
 - ? *The Moray Council Performance Indicators 2004-2005;*
 - ? *Public Performance Report 2004-2005;*
 - ? *A Review of Community Planning in Moray 2001-2006;* and
 - ? *Corporate Development Plan 2004-2007.*
- 1.7. Four focus groups were held in total over 2 days in January, with invitations letters issued to all Panel members who had indicated an interest in attending discussion groups. A maximum of 12 places were available at each group and these were assigned on a first-come-first-served basis. All those attending were offered £10 as a thank you and to cover any expenses incurred.

- 1.8. The location and timing of the focus groups were designed to maximise the range of Panel members able to take part. Groups were held in 3 separate locations (2 in Elgin, 1 in Aberlour and 1 in Keith) and at different times of the day (2 morning, 1 afternoon and 1 evening). Invite letters were issued to Panel members in the relevant Community Planning areas:
- ? Elgin groups - Elgin, Fochabers, Forres and Lossiemouth areas;
 - ? Aberlour group - Speyside area; and
 - ? Keith group - Buckie and Keith areas.
- 1.9. It should be noted that while the approach was successful in securing involvement across a range of geographic areas and demographic groups (see profile below), the number of groups held mean that robust findings are not available specific to each area.

Profile of Participants

- 1.10. A total of 44 Panel members attended the four focus groups; 10 in Aberlour, 11 in the first Elgin group, 10 in the second Elgin group and 13 in Keith. The demographic profile of participants is set out in the table below.
- 1.11. Focus group participants were relatively evenly distributed in terms of gender and geographical area; in particular it is notable that the groups included participants from each of the seven community planning areas.
- 1.12. Participants were less evenly spread across age cohorts with those aged 60+ accounting for around half of all those attending. This reflects in part the age profile of Panel members who have indicated a willingness to take part on focus group consultation. However, it should be noted that the age profile of participants varied across focus groups, primarily due to the timing of groups; the evening group held in Elgin (and to some extent the Aberlour group) were more balanced in terms of age group.

Profile of Focus Group Participants (N=44)

	Num
GENDER	
Male	20
Female	24
AGE	
Under 45	4
45-59	17
60+	23
GEOGRAPHIC AREA	
Buckie	5
Elgin	9
Fochabers	3
Forres	6
Keith	8
Lossiemouth	3
Speyside	10

- 1.13. This report considers the views and preferences of all focus group participants on public performance reporting. While the points made varied to some extent across the four focus groups, robust area-specific findings are not available due to the numbers of participants involved. In order to produce robust findings for sub-areas within Moray further consultation would be required. However, some views and preferences expressed did relate more to rural communities than those living in larger towns and this is noted in the text of the report.

2. AWARENESS OF CURRENT PUBLIC PERFORMANCE REPORTING

- 2.1. First the focus groups looked at participants' awareness and contact with current Council performance reporting, including any detail on specific reports seen or used by participants and access routes used. Participants were also asked at this early stage for their views on the overall importance of Council performance reporting, notwithstanding views on the priority given to specific types of performance information discussed in section 3.

Awareness of current reporting

- 2.2. Focus group participants were generally aware that the Council produces information on their performance, primarily through knowledge of local press reports (eg Northern Scot, Press & Journal) on issues such as education attainment and recycling.
- 2.3. However, specific knowledge of the type of performance information produced by the Council, of specific Council performance reports, or methods used for disseminating Council performance information was very poor. Most had not seen any of the performance reports circulated at the groups or any other Council performance information, and those who had come into contact with specific reports or other information were a small minority.
- 2.4. Of the reports circulated during the focus groups, participants were most likely to be familiar with the *Review of Community Planning in Moray* (and the associated *Community Plan* document). In addition, one or two participants had seen the main *Public Performance Report 2004-2005* in local libraries. However, it should be noted that some of those who had seen specific performance reports indicated that they recognised the report cover but had not previously picked up or read any of the documents.
- 2.5. Some suggested that awareness of specific performance reporting information or documents was likely to be limited to those currently active in a topic area (eg education) and it was felt that members of the public would have to actively seek out information.
- 2.6. Indeed, this is reflected in the fact that a number of those who **had** come into contact with specific reports had done so reporting through current or previous involvement in Community Councils and similar community groups, or as preparation for this round of focus groups. Others had seen some of the reports circulated at the focus groups at libraries or Council offices and some mentioned having received copies of the Community Planning Review delivered to their door.
- 2.7. We know that volunteering and community involvement is significantly higher amongst Panel members than the general public. If awareness of performance reporting is so closely linked to involvement in community groups and activities, this suggests that the low awareness of performance reporting amongst focus group participants may actually overestimate awareness across the wider community.

Views on importance of PPR

- 2.8. There was a clear view amongst participants that performance reporting is an important part of the Council's operation, although it was stressed that the content and method of presentation had to be relevant to communities and offer a truthful assessment of the Council's performance.
- 2.9. There were some suggestions that current arrangements are "reporting for reporting's sake", and that performance reporting should be focused more on the main purpose of better involving and informing communities. The importance of providing performance information which is relevant and of interest to the public was a strong theme throughout all four focus groups and informs much of the discussion presented in sections 3 and 4.
- 2.10. Views on the importance of performance reporting were in part linked to general support for maintaining communication channels between the Council and members of the community. However, views were more commonly and strongly linked to a need for evidence that the Council are achieving best value in the provision of services - ie from the point of view of Council Tax payers. Again, the link between the roll of the public as part funders of Council services and requirements for performance reporting is one which informs much of the discussion in sections 3 and 4.
- 2.11. Participants were also keen to highlight the importance of performance information for local residents as service users. For example, it was suggested that one of the motivations for members of the public seeking out performance information on education and social work services would be to enable individuals to make choices in their use of these services.

3. PERFORMANCE INFORMATION PRIORITIES

3.1. Here we consider focus group participants' views on performance reporting content, including specific priorities on information topics. Participants were asked to comment on the overall importance of each of the main topics under which performance information is currently published, and also for views on specific types of information and indicators under each topic which were likely to be of widest interest. The topic areas used were:

- ? Council income/spending
- ? Housing
- ? Education
- ? Social Work/ Care/ Criminal Justice
- ? Community Services
- ? Environmental Services/ Recycling

3.2. Participants felt that all of the topic areas listed were important for performance reporting to varying degrees, and identified a wide range of specific types of information against which the Council could report on their performance. However, there was some consensus across groups on the topics which are likely to be of greatest relevance and interest to Moray residents:

- ? Education;
- ? Council Income and Expenditure; and
- ? Recycling/ Waste management.

3.3. We now discuss each of these most popular topics in turn.

Education

3.4. This was the area where participants were most aware of current performance information, although this was typically through press reports (eg on class sizes and attainment levels) rather than awareness of specific Council reporting arrangements.

3.5. There was also a strong feeling across all four focus groups that this topic was likely to generate the broadest interest across local residents. Participants acknowledged that the number of residents making direct use of education services would be much smaller than in relation to waste/ recycling services for example, but many clearly felt quality of education was key to the strength of local communities and that all residents would have an interest in performance information.

3.6. In terms of the specific types of information/ indicators there was some disagreement on what was likely to be of most interest and relevance to local residents. Participants were often more familiar with performance information related to attainments and average grades, and there was strong support for reporting on basic reading/writing/maths attainment at a local authority and local level.

3.7. However, a number of participants suggested that other indicators related to student "wellbeing" and the operation of schools would be of wider relevance,

and felt that a strong focus on grades achieved was unhelpful and of less interest to many residents.

- 3.8. Participants clearly recognised the difficulty of reporting meaningfully on the “added value” provided by the education service, that is the extent to which a student’s ability and education level is improved rather than the eventual grade achieved. However, a number of indicators were suggested which do not related directly to attainment. These included class sizes, which many felt was at least as valid as an indicator of education quality as grades achieved. There was also support for reporting more closely linked to teaching arrangements, including the number and proportion of newly qualified teachers in Moray schools. “Consistency” of teaching for students and the use of supply teachers was also noted here as an indicator of education quality.
- 3.9. Attendance levels were also seen as an important indicator on the operation of schools, and there was some support for information on behavioural standards in schools.
- 3.10. There was also a very strong interest in performance information related to school occupancy levels, particularly in relation to the number of schools below or close to the 60% occupancy threshold involved in school closure decisions. This was in part related to other indicators on the operation and administration of schools, but was primarily linked to concern regarding school closures. Participants suggested that closures were one of local residents’ main areas of interest and concern and that there would be a strong interest in information on occupancy levels, particularly at a local area level.
- 3.11. This linked to a wider feeling that it may be more relevant to report education information at a local level. Participants clearly felt that there would be some interest in information at the Moray level, but suggested that many local residents would be seeking information at a more detailed local level. Participants also stressed the need to link with information available at an individual school level; for example it was suggested that reading/writing/maths attainment and average grades would of primary interest to parents at an individual school level.

Council Income and Expenditure

- 3.12. There was considerable interest in the financial information included in the *Public Performance Report 2004/05* which was circulated at the focus groups. Participants clearly felt that this was a key indicator of how efficiently the Council is operating, and specifically noted the relevance of this information to local residents as part-funders of the Council through Council Tax revenue.
- 3.13. In terms of specific information and indicators on income and expenditure, the focus of interest was very much on further detail on sources of Council income, and particularly how that income is spent across Council services. Indeed, there was some comment that more administrative information currently published, for example on payment of Council bills, were of little relevance or interest to members of the public.
- 3.14. Turning to the types of income and expenditure information in which participants expressed interest, particular mention was made of information

on funding streams such as Free Personal Care and Outdoor Access. Here participants were looking for more information on “Government Grants” as a source of Council revenue, but there was also a clear feeling that the Council should give a clear account of where and how money received within specific funding streams is used. Information on spending for specific projects such as flood alleviation was also mentioned here.

- 3.15. A number of participants also suggested that more information could be provided on spending *within* Council services, for example breaking down spend on Environmental Services to the level of refuse collection, recycling, bulk uplift, etc.
- 3.16. Many participants also felt that performance reports should include detail on the management structure of the Council and also information on staff salary levels. This was suggested in part as context to information on spending across Council services. However, some suggested that much of the concern and criticism of the Council was targeted at administrative and efficiency issues rather than specific services. In this regard it was suggested that there would be a strong interest in performance information related to Council structure and efficiency.
- 3.17. However, some felt that most local residents would not require more detailed income and expenditure information, and also suggested that detailed financial information would be “impenetrable” to many. There were also concerns that providing this level of detail across all topic areas would make performance reports long and unmanageable. Here participants mentioned the potential to provide much more detailed information to those who require it through digital media such as the internet or CD-ROMs.
- 3.18. Concern that detailed financial information could be difficult for many to absorb was also related to suggestions that more explanatory text is required to ensure that members of the public understand the financial information currently presented. This was in relation to background and context on funding sources and how spending is agreed, but also commentary text to highlight key points emerging and to make the presented information more relevant to residents.

Recycling and Waste Management

- 3.19. Participants felt that interest in information on environmental services would be perhaps more broad than for any other specific service, and that issues such as road maintenance, cleansing and waste management had a strong role in local residents’ day to day activities (unlike housing services for example).
- 3.20. However, it is perhaps surprising that in terms of performance information interest was focused almost exclusively on waste management and in particular recycling. Here participants noted that recycling was very topical issue, and one where local residents have significant involvement in delivery of services through sorting recyclable material.
- 3.21. There was support for current reporting on the proportion of all waste which is recycled, and the per household cost of waste collection. However, there was also strong demand for more detailed performance information, particularly to break down the types of material being recycled. Concerns

were also raised about whether material which is sorted by residents for recycling is sent to landfill, and there was some demand for information on this issue.

- 3.22. In relation to the cost of waste collection and recycling, participants were keen to see more information on the cost of recycling (eg per household of per volume), and there was some demand for the cost of collecting and disposing of recycled material to be compared to collection and disposal of other waste.
- 3.23. Participants were also keen to see more contextual information on how recyclable material is processed, for example the extent to which the material is reused by the Council (ie as compost) or is used to generate revenue through selling material. There was also demand for contextual information on where recycling materials are provided, for example the criteria for minimum size of communities, and also for background on the range of materials which can be recycled (eg problems recycling plastics). Linked to this, there was some demand for information on the proportion of households which have access to recycling materials.
- 3.24. Views on how best to present performance information are discussed in the next section, but it is interesting to note that participants felt that the ranking of refuse and recycling costs in Moray with other local authorities was misleading. Many suggested that use of target costs, or comparison with other rural local authorities would make costs more meaningful to residents.
- 3.25. In addition to recycling services, some were also concerned about the impact of the introduction of charging for the bulk uplift service, and there was support for information on whether charging has had an impact on use of the service and on flytipping.

Other Key Performance Indicators

- 3.26. The three main areas where focus group participants felt that performance information was of particular interest are outlined above. However, a number of other topics and specific indicators were also mentioned:
- 3.27. Overall, there was some feeling that performance reporting could do more to highlight current “hot topics” to make reports and materials more relevant to members of the public. Participants felt that although specific services or topic areas should not be excluded from performance reporting, it may be appropriate to highlight results in relation to topics which are likely to attract wider interest (eg recycling/ waste management, education) as a means of “selling” reports.
- 3.28. Some felt that reports did not do enough to summarise results of specific indicators to provide an overall picture of performance at the level of individual service departments or across the Council as a whole. It was suggested that performance reporting could make use of “meta-indicators” to summarise the performance of each Council department, for example a table presenting the number of indicators/ targets which each department has passed or failed.
- 3.29. On the housing topic, affordability of housing was seen as the main concern for Moray residents. However, there was a lack of clarity on the Council’s

role in facilitating the provision of affordable housing, and therefore what the Council can report in terms of performance information. There was also a lack of clarity on how affordability is defined in current performance reporting arrangements, and all felt that reports should include more detail on this.

- 3.30. The need for information on housing for particular groups, such as older people and those with disabilities was also highlighted as a potential gap in current performance reporting arrangements. While this was seen as being of primary interest to older people or those with particular housing needs, it was felt that information on the provision of this kind of housing would be relevant to the wider public.
- 3.31. In terms of indicators specific to Council-owned housing, participants felt that this information would be of interest both to Council residents and the wider public. The provision of information at a local area level was seen as relevant here, in part due to differences in the profile of Council housing across Moray and also the declining role of Council-owned stock in some areas. Information on the performance of local area housing managers in particular was mentioned.
- 3.32. Performance information on social services was also felt to be of broad interest, although participants were less clear on specific indicators which could be reported. Suggestions made included waiting lists for care and support (particularly for free personal care), information on social care staff (eg sickness/absence rates) and comparison of council and private provision (both in terms of level of provision on comparative cost).
- 3.33. Community justice was seen as a less significant issue for Moray overall, although participants felt that individuals affected by localised problems and issues would be keen to see this information. In this regard, reporting at a local area level was seen as important. There were few strong views on specific types of information to be reported, although community service and anti-social behaviour related information was mentioned. It is also worth noting that participants felt that information currently published by Police is of primary interest on community justice, and that it would be useful for Council reporting to provide links to this (eg specific reports or websites).
- 3.34. On community services, out-of-hours use of schools and use of community halls was seen as a particular issue. This was linked in part to school closures, and it was felt that smaller schools should be maintained through better use of available facilities. More information on use of museums and libraries was also suggested. In particular there was praise for the library service and participants highlighted a need for information on use of the service (eg PC use, CD/DVD borrowing compared to book borrowing).
- 3.35. Participants felt that level of use for these kinds of facilities was also a good indicator of the “vibrancy” of local communities - again there was some demand for local area level information. Participants also suggested the provision of links to further information or contacts for those wanting to use community services and venues.

Links to Other Sources

- 3.36. In addition to providing performance information required by members of the public, participants highlighted the potential to use performance reporting to

enable individuals to follow up areas of interest which may extend beyond core performance information. This related in part to suggestions for provision of summary documents which include link to sources of more detailed Council performance information, but also to providing links to other information and services relevant to the topics under which performance reporting is structured.

3.37. Examples of information and links which could be included were:

- ? School inspection reports and league tables;
- ? Police performance information;
- ? Housing access routes, especially for older people or those with particular housing needs;
- ? Recycling services, for example provision of composting bins; and
- ? Information on booking community venues, such as community halls.

Reliability and Confidence in Data

- 3.38. A number of focus group participants expressed concerns regarding the reliability of information provided in current reports, and in particular were sceptical about the validity of the Council providing information on the performance of its own services. Indeed, some felt that it may be appropriate to use an independent body to compile and report on performance information.
- 3.39. Some felt that performance reports “advertised the good points” for Council services, rather than providing a balanced view on Council performance. A minority indicated that they felt Council performance was generally relatively poor, and that reports did not reflect this. However, most were concerned about the extent to which the Council could offer balanced reports on its own performance.
- 3.40. In this regard there was some demand for more information on how specific performance indicators are identified, including the extent to which the range of indicators used are set by the Council themselves. Many felt that there was scope to repeat the current research, or use other forums to increase community involvement in defining performance reporting arrangements.
- 3.41. Similarly, participants felt that more background should be provided on how any targets or benchmarks used in performance reporting are set, and also how and when these are reviewed. There was also a lack of awareness of arrangements for auditing of performance reports, and more detail was required on this.

4. ACCESSING PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

- 4.1. Finally we look at views and preferences on how local residents access performance information. This includes techniques for presenting performance information (eg use of targets, graphs and charts, etc) and the most appropriate format for reporting. We also look at preferences on communication channels available for dissemination of information.

Data analysis techniques

- 4.2. In terms of the presentation of information on specific indicators, participants were asked to consider a range of currently used methods. These included presentation of numbers/ percentages only, identification of changes over time, measurement against pre-set targets, ranking of Moray performance against all other local authorities, and measurement against “comparator” local authorities.
- 4.3. Views were split on the most appropriate presentation method; indeed it was suggested that preferences are likely to vary across the community and a range of presentation methods would be required. In particular, a number of participants were critical of comparison of Moray with all other local authorities through ranking 1-32; it was suggested that this effectively compared Moray with very different areas such as Edinburgh and Glasgow.
- 4.4. Some felt that members of the public would not be interested in performance of other local authorities at all, and that reports should focus exclusively on results for Moray. However, most felt that some form of comparison to other areas was a useful way of making results more meaningful; preference was for use of comparator authorities rather than national ranking.
- 4.5. Overall, presentation of changes in findings over time, measurement against “comparator” authorities and comparison against pre-set targets or benchmarks were the most popular options. However, it is worth noting that some concerns were also raised about the implementation of these methods.
- 4.6. There was some scepticism regarding how meaningful targets or benchmarks are - this seemed to relate to a general lack of awareness of how targets are set, and by whom. For example, some felt that targets set by Council departments may not be sufficiently rigorous, and that they may be “just set at a level to make the Council look good”.
- 4.7. Participants were also unclear on how comparator local authorities were selected. Notwithstanding a minority of views that comparison to **any** other local authority is not relevant, it was suggested that more background could be provided on this selection process. Indeed, this point was also made in relation to use of targets or benchmarks; if these measures are used, information is required on how/ by whom targets/ comparators are defined and arrangements for review.

Presenting performance information

- 4.8. Turning to more general points on presentation of performance information, participants were similarly mixed in their views on the use of graphs and charts to present performance information. While it was agreed that these

improved the visual impact of reports, some found charts and graphs more difficult to understand and suggested that they could be “impenetrable” for those who are less comfortable with statistical reports.

- 4.9. There was also some scepticism about the extent to which charts and graphs can be manipulated to give a false impression of findings; for example the use of different scales to obscure or exaggerate differences in figures. Here it was also noted that charts and graphs presented in existing reports were often inadequately labelled (eg axis labelling and citation of sources), and some had difficulty understanding chart colour coding.
- 4.10. Some clearly felt that members of the public may find it easier to understand a simple table which compared indicators with targets or comparator local authorities for example. Certainly all agreed that charts or graphs should not be used to the exclusion of simple numbers and percentages.
- 4.11. With regards presentation of tabular information, the structured use of tables and text format of the *The Moray Council Performance Indicators 2004/05* report was praised. There was also support for the red/green colour coding of results presented in the report, which some participants felt combined simple presentation of numbers/ percentages with some of the visual impact benefits of charts and graphs. However, it was noted that the report did not explain the basis of colour coding.
- 4.12. Although views differed on the use of charts/ graphs and tabular information, there was a common view that presentation of performance information should include more contextual and commentary text. This was raised both in terms of giving a fuller explanation of terminology or conventions used in reports, but also in relation to providing better analysis and explanation of performance information presented in reports.
- 4.13. The need for more background and contextual information was noted in relation to explanation of targets in particular (eg how targets are set and reviewed), and also providing background on specific indicators. It is also interesting to note that some felt that being “more open” regarding the production of reports could help to address any mistrust of findings.
- 4.14. Examples of areas where clarification was requested were:
 - ? The range of recycling services available (and particularly why plastics cannot be recycled), and the proportion of homes with access to facilities.
 - ? The meaning of terms such as “affordable housing” and “desirable/ non-desirable”, and how they are defined and implemented.
 - ? Whether specific values presented are weekly, monthly, etc and clearer labelling of charts and graphs.
- 4.15. In addition to points made in relation to use of targets/ comparators and use of graphs/ charts, there was a strong feeling that better use of commentary text to summarise the main points emerging was key to making reports more engaging for members of the public. It was suggested that current reports simply stated figures under each topic heading, rather than translating those figures into meaningful findings - for example “we’re amongst the best at...” or “we’re not doing well/ want to do better on...”. Some also suggested that the inclusion of a short executive summary or key findings section would be a useful way of providing key findings in an easily digestible format.

- 4.16. There was also a strong feeling that performance reporting should avoid complex language and “jargon”. Many felt that the language used in current reports was not clear and included terms with which members of the public were unlikely to be comfortable. Specific examples cited include “affordable housing” and “lifelong learning”, although participants also noted that reports included numerous references to policies and initiatives which were likely to be unfamiliar and irrelevant to many readers.
- 4.17. Participants suggested that the great majority of residents would want to flick to specific topics rather than read performance reports from cover to cover, and it was felt that current reports and future reporting arrangements could do more to assist this. Moreover, it was noted that making it easier for individuals to access the topics and information that interest them would also help to make performance reporting seem more relevant.
- 4.18. In terms of specific changes to reports, participants suggested that a key findings or executive summary section could be added to provide brief highlights on each topic, with page references for more information. The need for clearer and simpler sectioning of reports was also mentioned. It was also noted that the more detailed *Public Performance Report 2004/05* did not include a contents page, and that none of the reports presented included an index.
- 4.19. The potential to use the internet or other digital media to deliver performance information was also mentioned in the context of “routing” individuals to their areas of interest. In particular, it was suggested that the internet offered greater scope than printed reports in terms of enabling individuals to access the information they are interested quickly and easily - eg through a search facility or clicking through links to access more detailed information on a specific topic.

Format and Style

- 4.20. In addition to praise for the presentation of information and layout of the *The Moray Council Performance Indicators 2004/05* report, there was also strong support for the smaller A5 format of the report. Most respondents felt that smaller reports or leaflets are “less daunting” for members of the public and give the performance information more impact by presenting it in a shorter, easier to digest way.
- 4.21. While a number of participants were clearly familiar with handling larger more detailed reports (eg through involvement in community groups), it was felt that smaller A5 format reports and leaflets were likely to be seen as more user friendly amongst members of the public with less experience or involvement in Community Planning for example.
- 4.22. Overall, there was a preference for performance reporting to focus more on highly summarised short A5 format reports or leaflets, presenting “headline” information on a small number of key indicators (including current “hot topics” such as recycling). However, in addition to providing information to the general public in a more easily digestible format, participants stressed the need to for these reports to have a role in directing those who are interested in accessing more detailed information.

- 4.23. The cost of producing larger and longer performance reports was also important for participants, and had some role in suggestions that smaller A5 reports may be preferable. Similarly, there were some suggestions that the number of performance reports should be rationalised, to both reduce the number (and therefore cost) of reports and also to ensure that performance reporting is conducted in a more coordinated way.
- 4.24. Many participants commented on the likely cost of the “lavish” performance reports circulated at focus groups, and questioned the extent to which they represented good value. This was raised particularly in relation to apparent low awareness of the reports, and mention was also made of the Council’s need to achieve savings across services. A number of participants felt that the style of the reports did not reflect this need.
- 4.25. Some clearly stated that they would be happy to receive reports printed on regular A4 paper (for example similar to school-published newsletters or leaflets), but most felt that some degree of professional printing was required. Indeed, the majority agreed that current reports did “give a good impression” and some felt that the professional appearance gave more substance to the information presented. All agreed that money could be saved by changing the format (eg A4 to A5 size) and particularly the printing quality of existing reports, without compromising the professional appearance of reports.
- 4.26. In relation to discussion of performance reporting costs, there were a number of suggestions that the Council should make use of recycled paper in the production of performance reports, and indeed in all Council-produced materials. Participants were unsure of the extent to which this would be a less expensive option, but the majority felt that using recycled paper (and advertising this on the cover of reports) was important in terms of the Council setting an example on sustainability.

Communication Channels

- 4.27. Comments and suggestions made in relation to use of particular communication channels was primarily in relation to broadening the current reach of Council performance reporting, although the possibility of achieving cost savings through more coordinated use of communication channels was also a factor.
- 4.28. Overall, participants felt that performance reporting should make use of as wide a range of communication channels as possible. Specific options mentioned were:
- ? local newspapers;
 - ? local radio and television;
 - ? posters, leaflets and reports in public places (eg Council offices, bus stations);
 - ? materials delivered to people’s door;
 - ? internet and other digital media (eg CD-ROM);
 - ? material distributed through community groups;
 - ? public notice-boards (eg community halls or supermarkets); and
 - ? public events and meetings, although there was some previous negative experience of poor attendance at such events.

- 4.29. However, while a wide range of communication options were suggested most felt that the Council should focus resources on a smaller number of “primary” communication channels which would reach a wider audience, alongside more local and less expensive options such as noticeboards and community groups. The need to find an appropriate and cost effective method(s) to communicate the “headline” performance information to as wide an audience as possible was stressed by all.
- 4.30. Most felt that the “core” of reporting should remain focused on printed material, with the preference was for highly summarised short reports or leaflets. Participants felt that focusing on smaller reports and leaflets would enable a wider distribution of performance information at a reasonable cost, with a smaller number of detailed reports made available to those interested in further information - the potential to use “on demand” printing was mentioned in this regard.
- 4.31. In this regard, although the general preference was for information to be delivered to the door it was appreciated that it would be difficult to make this an affordable option. There was some strong support for integrating performance information into existing communication methods, for example the Council Tax leaflet, as a more cost effective option than producing a dedicated performance information leaflet.
- 4.32. Many felt that using this option to include even an A5 page of information would be worthwhile given the large number of individuals reached, although participants also stressed the need to include directions to other channels for those seeking further information. There was some suggestion that a large proportion of households would dispose of the leaflets without reading them, but most felt that the leaflet would be an effective way of communicating performance information to a wide audience, if the cost remained manageable. It was also suggested that Council Tax may be a controversial topic to link performance information with, but again this was a minority view.
- 4.33. Publishing performance information through local newspapers was also mentioned as a potentially inexpensive way of reaching a wide audience. Participants were especially supportive of the option to include a pull-out centre section in the newspaper to providing summarised performance information and details for accessing further information. Many felt that this would be less likely to get “lost” in the detail of the newspaper.
- 4.34. There was strong support for this option, and some participants had previous examples of the Council using pull out newspaper sections to provide information. It was also suggested that issuing information through the local press could go some way towards addressing concerns regarding the robustness and independence of the performance information.
- 4.35. Participants were also supportive of the role of digital media such as the internet and CD-ROMs in providing performance information. Many felt that levels of internet access were insufficient to allow this to be the main communication channel, but all agreed that it was important to offer this alongside leaflets and other more detailed printed reports.
- 4.36. Participants also identified a number of perceived benefits for provision of information through the internet. Mention was made of the scope to update information published online more quickly and more regularly than printed

reports, and also of the fact that the internet is always available for individuals to access (notwithstanding concerns regarding levels of access).

- 4.37. However, the main perceived benefit identified was in relation to the potential to provide much more detailed information in a digestible format. It was suggested that a website should be able to present individuals with a short set of summarised performance information, from which they can click through to their area(s) of interest. This was seen as particularly important in the context of concerns about the value of producing lengthy printed reports, although some suggested that current online performance information did not take advantage of the capacity to provide more detailed information than is provided in reports.
- 4.38. In addition to some concerns about level of access to the internet, the main difficulty highlighted in relation to publishing information through the internet was in relation to computer skills. This was raised with particular reference to internet access through libraries; there was some concern that many local residents lacked the computer skills required to effectively access performance information online, without some level of personal assistance.
- 4.39. In this regard, there was strong support for making better use of “in person” communication channels. It was suggested that many local residents would prefer to have support from a “real person” to assist them in accessing performance information, particularly in accessing specific areas of information which may be lost in longer reports.
- 4.40. Many were aware of or had experience of existing Council Access Points, and felt that the Council could make greater use of Access Points for providing performance information. There was also some strong support for a telephone helpline, and again the emphasis was on assistance from Council staff to access specific information or topics.
- 4.41. All participants stressed the importance of including appropriate follow up contact details in all performance reporting materials, particularly in light of support for a summarised leaflet. Indeed, some felt that it was more important to circulate information on how to access the required performance findings, rather than to focus on large scale circulation of the performance information itself.
- 4.42. The importance of maintaining two-way communication with members of the public was also highlighted. Although the majority of participants indicated that they would be unlikely to use these mechanisms, all felt that good communication between the Council and members of the public required offering means to provide feedback (ie through feedback forms or telephone contacts). The need to respond to any individuals making comment or providing feedback was also highlighted.

5. KEY FINDINGS

- 5.1. Here we present key findings emerging from the consultation process, under each of the main consultation topics.

Awareness Of Current Public Performance Reporting

- 5.2. Focus group participants were generally aware that the Council produces information on their performance, with a number of individuals making reference to reports in the local press relating to Council performance - for example on education attainment and recycling.
- 5.3. However, awareness of specific current Council reporting arrangements was low amongst participants; those who had come into contact with specific performance reports or other performance information were in the minority. Moreover, some of those who **had** come into contact with specific reports recognised the document cover but had not read the contents.
- 5.4. Of the four reports circulated during the focus groups, participants were most likely to be familiar with the *Review of Community Planning in Moray* (and the associated *Community Plan* document). In terms of communication channels, those who were aware of performance reporting documents had typically seen these through involvement in the Council (ie as employees) or community organisations. A small number reported having seen the document(s) in local libraries, and some had received copies of the Community Planning Review delivered to their door.
- 5.5. There was a clear view amongst participants that performance reporting is an important part of the Council's operation. This was primarily in relation to providing evidence that the Council are achieving best value in the provision of services - ie from the point of view of Council Tax payers. However, participants also noted the important of performance information for local residents as service users, for example to enable individuals to make choices in their use of services such as local schools, social housing, etc.

Performance Information Priorities

- 5.6. Although the focus groups identified a wide range of topics under which the Council could report on their performance, there was some consensus across groups on the topics which are likely to be of greatest relevance and interest to Moray residents:
- ? Education;
 - ? Council Income and Expenditure; and
 - ? Recycling/ Waste management.

Education

- 5.7. This was the area where participants were most aware of current performance reporting, typically through press reports (eg on class sizes and attainment levels). Participants also suggested that this was the area where members of the public were most likely to seek performance information.

- 5.8. There was some disagreement in the types of information and indicators likely to be of most interest and relevance to local residents. Some felt that information on school attainment - particularly on reading, writing and arithmetic - would be of most interest.
- 5.9. Others suggested that attainment levels would be of interest to parents and those with direct involvement in education, but that other indicators such as attendance levels, class sizes and cost of education services would be of interest to a wider audience. School occupancy rates were noted as of particular interest to rural communities in the context of school closures.
- 5.10. There was a general feeling that it may be more relevant to report education information at a local level, and that school grades in particular may be less relevant at the overall Moray level. It was generally agreed that information on class sizes, school occupancy, etc would be relevant across Moray as a whole - and particularly at a local area level - but some suggested that grade levels would be of primary interest to parents at an individual school level. In this context it was suggested that performance reporting on education should include direct reference to sources of more detailed information (eg school inspection reports).

Council Income and Expenditure

- 5.11. There was considerable interest in the financial information included in the *Public Performance Report 2004/05* which was circulated at the focus groups. Participants clearly felt that this presented information which was important and of interest to members of the public as one of the Council's funding sources through Council Tax.
- 5.12. There was some demand expressed for more detailed information to be presented, including:
- ? A breakdown of spending ***within*** services; for example refuse collection, recycling, bulk uplift, etc
 - ? Financial information specific to individual projects or topics. Suggestions here included flood alleviation and investment in schools infrastructure.
 - ? Information tracking the source and use of specific funding streams such as Core Paths/Outdoor Access.
- 5.13. However, some participants felt that most local residents would not require information beyond that being currently reported, and also suggested that detailed financial information would be "impenetrable" to many. Indeed there were some comments that more contextual and explanatory text is required to ensure that members of the public understand the financial information currently presented.
- 5.14. There were also concerns that providing this level of detail across all topic areas would make performance reports long and unmanageable. The potential to provide much more detailed information through the internet or other digital media (eg CD-ROMs) was mentioned here.

Recycling/ Waste management

- 5.15. Waste management services were identified by participants as playing a strong role in local residents' day to day activities (unlike housing services for example). Recycling in particular was identified as a service where local residents have significant involvement in delivery of services through sorting recyclable material, and that residents would have a strong interest in performance information here.
- 5.16. There was support for current reporting on the proportion of all waste which is recycled, and the per household cost of waste collection and recycling services. However, this was an area where many felt that comparison of refuse/recycling costs in Moray with dissimilar local authorities (ie through the ranking included in the *The Moray Council Performance Indicators 2004/05* report) was misleading.
- 5.17. There was also demand for more detailed information on recycling of specific types of material, both in terms of the volume of recycling and cost per household. Participants also suggested that more contextual information was required on recycling, for example on constraints on the type of material which can be recycled and on criteria used in determining where to provide services (eg any minimum population limits). In this regard there was also some interest in information on how many households currently have access to specific recycling services.

Other key information/ indicators

- 5.18. The three main areas where focus group participants felt that performance information was of particular interest are outlined above. However, a number of other topics and specific indicators were also mentioned:
- ? Some felt that reports did not do enough to summarise results of specific indicators to provide an overall picture of performance at the level of individual service departments or across the Council as a whole. It was suggested that performance reporting could make use of "meta-indicators" to summarise the performance of each Council department, for example a table presenting the number of indicators/targets which each department has passed or failed.

? *To be added*

Accessing Performance Information

- 5.19. In terms of the presentation of information on specific indicators, participants were asked to consider a range of currently used methods. These included presentation of numbers/ percentages only, identification of changes over time, measurement against pre-set targets, ranking of Moray performance against all other local authorities, and measurement against "comparator" local authorities.
- 5.20. Views were split on the most appropriate presentation method; indeed it was suggested that preferences are likely to vary across the community and a range of presentation methods would be required. Overall changes over time, comparison against pre-set targets and measurement against "comparator" authorities the most popular.

- 5.21. In particular, a number of participants were critical of comparison of Moray with all other local authorities through ranking 1-32; it was suggested that this effectively compared Moray with very different areas such as Edinburgh and Glasgow. However, it should be noted that some concerns were also raised about the implementation of preferred measures:
- ? There was some scepticism on how meaningful target would be, and this seemed to relate to a general lack of awareness of how targets are set and by whom. For example, some felt that targets set by Council departments may not be sufficiently rigorous.
 - ? Participants were also unclear on how comparator local authorities were selected. Some clearly felt that comparison to **any** other local authority would not be relevant, but others suggested that comparator local authorities could be useful as part of performance reporting measures, for example alongside pre-set targets.
- 5.22. Participants were also somewhat mixed in their views on the use of graphs and charts to present performance information. Some felt that this helped to improve the visual impact of the reports, but others found charts and graphs were more difficult to understand. It was also suggested that charts and graphs presented in existing reports were often inadequately labelled (ie axis labelling and citation of sources).
- 5.23. Some felt that members of the public may find it easier to understand a simple table which compared indicators with targets or comparator local authorities for example. The simple table and text format of the *The Moray Council Performance Indicators 2004/05* report was supported by some and there was also support for the red/green colour coding of results presented in the report, although it was noted that the report did not explain the basis of colour coding.
- 5.24. Notwithstanding differences of opinion on the use of charts/ graphs and tabular information, there was a common view that presentation of performance information should include more contextual and commentary text. The need for more contextual information was noted in relation to explanation of targets in particular, and also to provide background on why specific indicators were included and how results calculated. Similarly, it was felt that better use of text to summarise the main points emerging from specific indicators or topics would be helpful.
- 5.25. In this regard the need to avoid complex language was stressed by all participants. There was a general feeling that language used in current reports included too much "jargon" and was not sufficiently tailored to the intended audience (ie the general public). Participants supported the use of simpler language, presented in shorter sentences and "bulleted" main findings.
- 5.26. Simplicity of layout of performance information was stressed by all participants. While some felt that use of local photographs and charts to present data made reporting more appealing, all agreed that reports needed to be more clearly set out.
- 5.27. It was suggested that the great majority of local residents would be looking for a specific piece of information or topic area in the reports rather read the

documents from cover to cover, and the reports should be more amenable to this. For example, it was noted that the more detailed *Public Performance Report 2004/05* did not include a contents page, and that none of the reports presented included an index. The need to clear sectioning of reports was also stressed.

- 5.28. Overall, the smaller A5 format of the *The Moray Council Performance Indicators 2004/05* report was preferred to the larger, more detailed reports. Indeed many participants suggested that the most appropriate method for disseminating findings to the wider public would be through highly summarised leaflets (ie up to 4-6 pages), with more details reports available in smaller numbers to those wishing to pursue further information.
- 5.29. The cost of producing performance reports was important here. Many participants immediately commented on the likely cost of “lavish” performance reports and questioned whether the production of large numbers of glossy detailed reports represented good value, particularly given the low awareness of the reports.
- 5.30. Most felt that some degree of professional printing was required, although some clearly stated that they would be happy to receive reports printed on regular A4 sheets. However, all agreed that money could be saved by changing the format (ie A4 to A5 for some reports) and printing quality of existing reports. The need to rationalise the number of performance reports was also noted here.
- 5.31. Use of particular communication channels was also related to cost savings, in addition to broadening the current reach of Council performance reporting. Participants agreed on the general point that a wide range of channels should be used to reach as wide an audience as possible, with mention made of local newspapers, leaflets delivered through the door, reports made available in public places, information made available through the internet and/or CD-ROM, use of local radio/ television and use of public notice-boards.
- 5.32. Most felt that the “core” of reporting should remain focused on printed material, with the general preference being for highly summarised short reports presented in local newspapers or leaflets delivered through the door. The use of pull-out sections in local newspapers in particular was mentioned as a relatively inexpensive way of reaching a wide audience, and the inclusion of performance information in existing leaflets issued with Council Tax notices was also supported by most.
- 5.33. Participants were keen to note that leaflet-style reports should include only high level “headline” findings, for example focusing on particular “hot topics” to draw people in to seeking out further information. A key role of this summarised reporting would therefore be to set out what performance information is available, and how this can be accessed.
- 5.34. The role of digital media such as the internet and CD-ROMs, alongside more detailed printed reports, was mentioned here as providing a source of further information to those interested in finding out more on Council performance. Here participants stressed the capacity for the internet to provide a large amount of detailed information in a relatively easy to digest way, for example by individuals clicking through links to get to their specific area of interest.

APPENDIX - FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION SCHEDULE

Awareness of Public Performance Reporting

Have you seen any forms of Council performance reporting? Eg posters, leaflets, etc

- ? Recently? Where was this?
- ? Did you look at the document at the time? What did you think (easy to read, interesting to you, anything missing)?

How important do you think it is for Councils publish information on their performance? Why is it important/ unimportant? Would you use the information?

Types of Performance Information

Going to consider each service/topic heading - what kinds of information do you think people will be most interested in? Which would be relevant/ of interest to you?

Council income/spending

- ? *Prompt if needed:* Sources of Council income, Spending across departments, Council Tax arrears

Housing

- ? *Prompt if needed:* Number affordable homes build, Rent arrears, Repairs conducted within target time, Homelessness application handling

Education

- ? *Prompt if needed:* Class sizes, Primary level reading/writing/maths attainment, Standard grade/ higher attainment. Attendance levels, Lifelong learning uptake

Social Work/ Care/ Criminal Justice

- ? *Prompt if needed:* Staff qualifications, Numbers reported to Court for breach of probation, Levels of persistent offending, Levels of fostering

Community Services

- ? *Prompt if needed:* Attendance at sports/leisure centres, Use of libraries

Environmental Services/ Recycling

- ? *Prompt if needed:* Roads maintenance, Winter maintenance/ street lighting, Public transport - eg, bus shelters, low level buses, Percentage of waste recycled, Cost per property of refuse collection/disposal

Which of these overall headings do you think people are most interested in? Any other suggested topics?

Appearance and layout

Information is presented in a number of different ways at the moment. Which do you think is most helpful?

- ? Just a number of percentage on its own
- ? Compared against Council targets
- ? Compared over time (increased or decreased)
- ? Compared against other areas - similar LAs, nationally, ranking

Would a written commentary giving some background to the figures and possibly highlighting main findings help?

How important is **presentation**?

- ? The type of document? Eg, full reports, smaller documents, leaflets, posters
- ? Style - glossy, typeface, colour scheme, branding
- ? Layout - use of diagrams/charts
- ? The type of language used
- ? Having contact details if you have questions about the information, or a feedback form to give your views

How best to **access information**?

- ? Publishing in local press
- ? Published reports available on request/in public places
- ? Delivered to people - to your door(eg Council Tax notice), on display in schools/libraries, holding open days/public meetings, information helpline
- ? What about digital information - online, CDs, etc? Particular benefits with this medium? Any problems/ draw backs?
- ? How often/ **when published**? Eg education information, spending, winter maintenance

Who do you think will be more interested in performance? What about **targeting particular groups**?

- ? specific service users
- ? local areas
- ? demographic groups
- ? community councils

How much **confidence** do you think you would have in Council performance reporting? *If low confidence why? How improved?*

Do you think people will want to be involved in the future in deciding what is reported and how? Have included feedback forms in some reports - do you think people would use these? Manage this in some other way?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME