Best Value: how Local Authorities in Northern Ireland are consulting with stakeholders

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Abstract
This paper investigates how local authorities in Northern Ireland have dealt with the consultation aspect of the Best Value initiative, with specific reference to engagement with stakeholders. Having briefly looked at the history of, and the rationale behind, Best Value and the requirements it places on local authorities, some of the advantages and disadvantages of the scheme are outlined. The paper then introduces some of the tenets of stakeholder theory, particularly those of Freeman, and investigates the wide range of stakeholders that any council will have. The responsibilities of a Northern Ireland local authority are then compared and contrasted to those of Best Value to suit local circumstances as are provided managers with better information. Initially however these local PIs proved to problematic with indicators being chosen for which there was no accurate measure, over which managers had no control or simply because they were easy to collect (ODPM, 2001).

Introduction
Best Value was introduced by way of the Local Government Act of 1999 (DETR, 1999) and was seen as the latest in a line of initiatives to make local government more effective, efficient and economic. With regard to accountability, it succeeded the Citizen’s Charter, which had been introduced by the Conservative government in the early 1990s. The Citizens Charter had required local government authorities throughout the United Kingdom (UK) to publish performance information; Best Value however was more far-reaching and required the production of five-year development plans, in which local authorities were set out a five-year rolling programme of service review, including long-term objectives in each service area and the strategies for achieving them. Additionally, on an annual basis, councils were to issue, by way of annual reports or Best Value Performance Plans (BVPPs), detailed accounts of how they were achieving targets set for a particular year within the five-year cycle.

The essence of best value is the continuous improvement in service quality. In order to remain competitive, organisations need to know how well they are performing, what their strengths and weaknesses are and whether quality of their outputs is satisfactory or improving. They also need to be able to identify trends in performance as soon as possible. One of the aims of successive Conservative governments from 1979 until 1997 was to make public sector organisations more competitive in their outlook and thus a regime of performance measurement was introduced. Whereas Margaret Thatcher focussed on the Civil Service, her successor John Major targeted local government and, due to his reforms, from 1992 onwards councils had to measure themselves against a series of performance indicators (PIs) prescribed by the Audit Commission (AC). The aim of these PIs was to give an authority a comprehensive baseline of performance against which they, and the people they serve, could judge the progress they were making. Furthermore the government equally needed to ensure that the priorities on which it had been elected were being delivered and that standards were being met across the range of public services. These indicators were subsequently increased and superseded by those laid down by the Labour government’s Best Value initiative.

There are two types of Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPs) that local authorities use. Firstly, Best Value Corporate Health indicators provide a snapshot of how well the authority is performing over (JETR, 1998a, p. 12). These indicators are designed to reflect the underlying capacity and performance of local authorities as both democratic or locally accountable institutions and bodies responsible for managing a significant share of public expenditure. Secondly, Best Value Service Delivery Indicators (JETR, 1998b, p. 12) reflect the national interest in the delivery of local services. These indicators are designed to enable comparisons to be made between the performances of different authorities, including different types of authorities, and within an authority over time. A capacity to compare was one of the key pillars or 4 C’s that formed the foundations of Best Value, the others being challenge, compete and finally consult, as in consult with the community.

Authorities were also encouraged to develop and use local PIs, in addition to those specified by the government. It was felt that local indicators would provide important measures of local performance, and of the responsiveness of the authority to meeting local needs. They would, in theory, allow authorities to reflect local priorities and tailor those of one in England to suit local circumstances as well as providing managers with better information. Initially however these local PIs proved to problematic with indicators being chosen for which there was no accurate measure, over which managers had no control or simply because they were easy to collect (ODPM, 2001).

Best Value is not without its critics, the number of performance measures are felt by some writers to be excessive (see for example Ball, Broadbent & Moore, 2002 and Boyne, 2000), moreover the preparations for the constant rounds of inspections and the requirement to increase levels of consultation with all stakeholders is time consuming and resource intensive (Martin, 2000, 2002). There is also a feeling that after 18 years of a Conservative government, local authorities expected more independence under the Labour government that finally retook power in the May of 1997. One key Conservative initiative, known as Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT), was seen as ultimately wasteful, as local authorities often had to go through a process of bidding to provide a service for which they had previously been responsible, when there was no actual competition.

In Northern Ireland (NI), which is governed by UK legislation, there are 26 local authorities, consisting of 12 borough councils, ten district councils, and four city councils. There are no county councils in NI, though given that it has a population of only 1.7 million there is a feeling that there is a surplus of local governance structures. As Carmichael (2002) remarks, a thorough examination of the whole system of public administration in NI is long overdue; as part of the Programme for Government, the NI Executive has commissioned a Review of Public Administration (RPA). This body (RPA) has been tasked with the consideration of aspects of how the devolved institutions relate to the extended system of sub-regional governmental arrangements (Carmichael, 2003); naturally, local authorities in NI form a key constituency within these sub-governmental arrangements. Similarly, the establishment and presence of the devolved institutions in recent times: as Carmichael (2002) notes, the onset of political devolution within the UK since 1998 more generally has meant that government and policy in Britain have become messy. As he cogently points out:

Centralisation coexists with fragmentation and interdependence. The policy intentions of central government often driven under unintended consequences. The attempted centralisation of political power operates in tandem with decentralisation of delivery. Government is increasingly characterised by diversity, power interdependence and policy networks. (2002, p. 4)

The complexity of local governance arrangements in NI need not, however, be a limiting factor in conducting research into the efficacy of local governance. As Carmichael (2002) further notes, NI provides a fascinating ‘working model’ of multi-level governance arrangements in practice, with many actors involved in the delivery of public services; it is for this reason it was selected as the research setting for the study into Best Value.

Methodology
The stated objective of Best Value is to bring about continuous improvement in service delivery that reflects the needs of the community: this will be tested by way of an empirical study that addresses the topic using the conceptual framework of stakeholder theory - in particular Freeman’s (1998) typologies will be of especial interest. He posits that stakeholder theory can be approached from...
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Two different perspectives: an analytical approach, which is concerned with how managers take stakeholder interests into account in managing their organisation; and a narrative approach, which is concerned with normative techniques that prescribe what managers ought to be doing in relation to their stakeholders.

A survey strategy (employing a document content analysis in the first instance) was employed to assess the degree to which consultation is being conducted by local authorities in NI. This involved reviewing the contents of the five-year and BVPPs and assessing the level of interaction between local authorities and their various stakeholders. This process assisted in identifying whether a local authority has merely stated an intention to consult or is including relevant measurement as part of its BVPIs. The document content analysis provided insights into Best Value from the analytical perspective of Freeman’s typologies and also established a basis for further developing the research from the narrative approach, as also advocated by Freeman. By adopting a stakeholder analysis approach, light will be thrown on the adequacy and efficacy of the nature of stakeholder relationships in the implementation of Best Value in NI.

To reduce subjectivity, two individuals, using the agreed framework, independently and separately conducted the document content analysis of both corporate plans and BVPPs before discussing and agreeing the results. As Dansereau (1998, pp. 163-164) states, a content analysis of government publications provides a source of information that would appear to be authoritative, objective and factual, however he warns against treating all statistics contained in such documents as objective facts. Nevertheless research based on documents can be valuable providing if ‘incorporates as wide and inclusive data as possible’ (Dansereau, 1998, p. 160). In the case of this survey, 25 out of the 26 local authorities in NI either provided the necessary documentation or had it available on the internet, with participation by the remaining council being constrained for logistical reasons, therefore the data used was both wide and inclusive.

Best Value

Best Value was seen as the centrepiece of the new Labour government’s wide reform agenda aimed at modernising local government. It replaced two Conservative initiatives, the Citizens Charter, which emphasised the publication of performance information, and CCT, which focussed on innovation, responsiveness and continuous improvement. According to Ball et al. (2002, p. 9) it placed ‘considerable, yet ambiguous demands on local authorities’ capabilities’. Local authorities have to work with a complex area of measures including 18 corporate health indicators, 104 service delivery indicators and a number of local indicators laid down by the authority itself. The corporate health indicators are used in order ‘to provide a snapshot of how well the authority is performing overall’ (DETR, 1998a, p. 12) and would be categorised under the following areas:

- Planning and measuring performance
- Customers and the community
- Management of resources
- Staff development
- Partnership working

In order to ensure the service delivery indicators gave a balanced view of performance the government adopted five dimensions of performance (DETR, 1998a, p. 12). These are:

- Strategic objectives: why the service exists and what it seeks to achieve;
- Cost/efficiency: the resources committed to a service and the efficiency with which they are turned into outputs;
- Service delivery outcomes: how well the service is being operated in order to achieve the strategic objectives;
- Quality: the quality of the services delivered, explicitly reflecting users’ experience of services;
- Fair access: ease and equality of access to services.

These BVPIs partly superseded those prescribed by the AC that all local authorities had to both use and disclose since 1992, however, despite this large number of indicators Boyne (2000, p. 8) felt that not all areas of local government performance were covered and although there is a constant reviewing of the indicators a more comprehensive set of measurements would not necessarily improve the situation. This is intended to organisations, commercial and otherwise, using performance measurement frameworks such as Kaplan and Norton’s (1992, p. 72) Balanced Scorecard (BSC), whereby recently Farmer (2003, p. 15) has been suggested that an ideal or management plans have too much information. There is also the problem, which is common with performance measurement, that whilst trying to achieve the longer-term aims of quality and continuous improvement, local authorities are having to demonstrate improvements against a wide range of short-term, prescribed PIs. Furthermore, the ‘one size fits all’ approach fails to appreciate the different environments that local authorities work in, urban councils generally face more complex and dynamic environments than rural councils, because service needs tend to be more diverse and revenues less stable. (Boyne, 2001, p. 82). This latter argument however, is countered by Brooks’ assertion that ‘national performance targets will be set by government although locally agreed corporate plans will acknowledge territorial variation’ (2000, p. 598).

Futhermore the top performing councils should face a more relaxed level of regulation than those poorer performing councils under the government’s four-point scale of overall performance (i.e. high-performing, shining, coasting and poor performing). A subsequent White Paper (DTLR, 2001) did acknowledge that changes in Best Value were needed. BVPIs were to be simplified and better focused, reviews were to become fewer in number and inspections were to be more proportioned and co-ordinated, in other words the whole process was to become more streamlined.

Whilst there has been a definite shift away from the market-driven, CCT approach of the Conservative government, the Labour government that came into power in 1997 has continued to keep pressure on local government and therefore the political tension that previously existed between central and local government has not abated. The central-local relationship under the Conservatives could probably be summarised by what Stewart (2000, p. 94) calls the strange phenomenon of a local perception of increasing central and a central perception of a lack of control; thus the impression was created, over the 18 years the Conservatives were in power, that were Labour to return to government, there would be greater levels of freedom for local authorities. Labour as a party has always been keen to give the support of many local government employees and is supported by the leaders of the Local Government Association as a government (Brooks, 2000, p. 594), nevertheless, despite some early enthusiasm for Best Value (see Martin, 1999), Labour’s policies have not necessarily turned out to be the panacea that local authorities expected. For one thing as Boyne, Gould Williams, Law and Walker observed (1999, p. 23) ‘the Best Value framework itself contains a strong emphasis on competition and implies a continuing role for competitive tendering in local government’ although guidance on this issue has been ambiguous and at times contradictory. Furthermore the continuous improvement aspect of Best Value, which aims to make local authorities continually seek ways of improving quality and reducing costs has confused some local government officers, especially when they feel no further improvement is possible (Ball et al., 2002, p. 12). With regard to central government and Next Steps agencies, optimum levels were recommended when it came to target setting, these levels then became the goal and the agency need not, and in some cases should not, strive to go beyond that goal (Next Steps Team, 1996, p. 79).

Best Value requires a more strategic planning approach yet the external regulation mechanisms of PIs, audit and inspection, constrain the behaviour and the performance of the local authority (Boyne, 2000, p. 7) thereby restricting their freedom. Ball et al. (2002, p. 11) further highlighted this contradiction in that Best Value tries to restore a local authority’s freedom in the way it delivers services whilst at the same time requiring it to demonstrate quantifiable improvements. Midwinter is sceptical about Labour’s entire modernising agenda, stating that there is little new about it, he feels that there is ‘similarity of the approach to right-wing think tanks in the Thatcher era’ with the
Most benchmarking in NI is between councils within the province; Boyne (2002, p. 23) felt a similar situation developing in Wales could lead to a limited degree of comparison. The one exception would be Belfast, which does benchmark against other UK cities via the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) performance networks. The APSE is determined to increase the amount of comparisons between NI local authorities and those in other parts of the UK and is making some headway. The NI Local Government Audit Branch from the Department of the Environment is responsible for scrutiny, thus once again this is all conducted at a local level.

The population breakdown of NI is also very different to that of England with comparatively very little ethnic diversity. This issue has an impact on the types of stakeholders a local authority will have and influences the way they are treated. For example, if Belfast is compared with the majority of English cities the number of members of ethnic minority groups, and the range of such groups, is far less. Indeed the figures provided by the 2001 census indicated that the proportion of NI was 99.15% white (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, 2002). Thus when community issues are mentioned, they are mainly concerned with the integration of Roman Catholics and Protestants in the so-called flashpoint or interface areas. For example in the corporate plan of Artrim Borough Council for 2002-2006, one of the strategic objectives is to "encourage agreement in the approach to flags emblems and murals throughout the borough" (2002, p. 22). Although dealing with such community problems is a demanding task, it is one which local authorities are used to dealing with. Compare this with a local authority in London having to cope with a wide range of Eastern European or African stakeholders who will have vastly differing needs and will have to be treated with great sensitivity when it comes to issues such as housing.

Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory is widely adopted in the UK as a means of identifying and managing the interests of all relevant parties in a given situation. It is an increasingly popular approach in public service management as a way of identifying and managing the expectations of a wide range of stakeholders. It is based on the idea that organisations are not isolated from their environment but are part of a complex network of interacting entities (Freeman, 1984). Stakeholders are individuals or groups who can affect or who are affected by the achievement of an organisation's goals. This includes customers, employees, suppliers, competitors, government, and the general public. The theory suggests that organisations should consider the interests of all stakeholders and seek to balance these interests in order to achieve sustainable success.

Best Value In Northern Ireland

There are some significant differences between the model of Best Value that operates in England and that of NI. For one thing the ambit of influence of the local authorities in NI is nowhere near as extensive as it is in Great Britain (GB). According to Dickson (2001), NI local government organisations are typically responsible for environmental health, noise, nuisance, consumer protection, litter prevention, the enforcement of building regulations and the licensing of street trading, but not for substantial expenditures such as housing and education services, as would commonly be the case in GB. The rather limited ambit of influence of local government stems from the publication of the Maclrory report in 1970, which examined the future of local government in NI. At the time of its publication, the anticipation was that the other functions commonly administered by local authorities in GB, would be transferred to bodies at a NI wide level, to be administered by central departments or board arrangements. As Carmichael (2002) notes, however:

Throughout, the existence of a regional government at Stormont as a sine qua non (prerequisite) in a future administrative structure underpinned the Maclrory recommendations. In the event, implementation of Maclrory was overtaken by the deteriorating political situation. Direct Rule effectively stymied most of Maclrory's proposals leaving Northern Ireland as the limiting case of central control and residual local government in the UK. (2002, p.16)

The situation regarding enhanced levels of local accountability (as foreseen in the Maclrory report) were not given full expression until the end of Direct Rule in 1999 and the subsequent devolution of powers to the new Northern Ireland Assembly. The RPA is currently considering the refinement of these accountability mechanisms, but in the interim, the historically restricted role played by NI local authorities remains.

Due to this historically restricted remit of NI local authorities, within the context of Best Value, there are a smaller number of PIs - councils in NI currently collect data for 57 indicators but these are currently under review and could soon be reduced to around 40. Furthermore the Beacon Council scheme only applies in England and NI local authorities are not subject to the aforementioned four-point scale of performance, thus they will not be immediately affected by the more recently introduced comprehensive performance assessments (CPAs). However, a Best Value Steering Group, established in 2002, is to produce guidance on a number of key issues by early 2004, and it is expected that this will include the role of CPAs in NI.
As with other elements of Best Value there are resource implications; Martin (2000, p. 223) felt that ‘the requirement for in-depth consultation with local communities can be time consuming and resource intensive’. Sanderson (2001, p. 311) however, thought there was a need to involve stakeholders in the decision making process, and that various groups needed to play their part in the setting of performance measures, otherwise the whole exercise would ‘degenerate into a mechanistic process, a superficial ‘paper-chase’, subject to manipulation and avoidance tactics and become thereby discredited, making culture change even harder’. When it comes to the stakeholders of any local model there is a difficulty in drawing a boundary around them, as even within a fairly small environment such as NI they are difficult to categorise with any great precision. In the Local Government (Best Value) Act (NI) they are defined as:

- Persons liable to pay rates in respect of hereditaments in the district of the council;
- Persons who use or are likely to use services provided by the council; and
- Persons appearing to the council to have an interest in the district of the council. (2002)

Although the above summary is both concise and all encompassing it merely masks the fact that theoretically the number of stakeholders for a local authority are limitless. Stewart (2000, p. 113) points out that as well as ‘communities of place, which may seek to maintain the distinctiveness of their area, there are also communities of interest, of background and of concern’ and each presses it views upon the local authority. In their integrated county development strategy 2010, Fermanagh District Council (1998) – with a population of 79,027 - included what it referred to as a stakeholder’s map, on which 138 different stakeholders were identified. Furthermore the local authority had placed what could be a large number of stakeholders into single categories, for example ‘visitors to Fermanagh’, ‘voluntary organisations’, ‘businesses’ and ‘community’. This underlines a major problem of using the stakeholder approach in assessing the efficacy of the workings of local authorities - how can a local authority consider consulting with such a large range of diverse groups when it is making decisions about service provision or delivery? Even Simon’s (March and Simon, 1958) theory on satisfying (making satisfactory rather than optimal decisions when faced with constraints) is inappropriate in such a situation as it would not even be possible to do this with such a broad range of stakeholders. Local authorities and sub-units of a council therefore appear to face a dilemma; on the one hand they are expected to include all stakeholders when making decisions and yet on the other they do not have either the resources or the capabilities to consult with all interested parties.

A similar problem does not exist with other organisations, such as private sector companies, where the definition of stakeholders would appear to be not as amorphous. In 1975 the then accounting regulatory body, the Accounting Standards Steering Committee included in its Corporate Report six different groups that had an interest in the annual reports of public limited companies (plcs), this was later reduced to four following a report by McMOnnies on behalf of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland (1988, p. 10). Subsequently the regulatory body that came into force in 1990, the Accounting Standards Board suggested that stakeholders (the providers of risk capital) are the primary stakeholder group and that all other groups are subservient to their needs (1991). Therefore according to the accounting standard, the number of private sector stakeholders is on the decline whilst Freeman (1984) would argue that it is increasing. Notwithstanding these opposing views, the concept of customers is very different in the private sector where this group would only include direct customers, that is people or groups to which the plc supplied goods or services. The definition of a customer for a local authority would include anyone living in the area, whether they contributed to the revenue of the council or not, and anyone visiting the area for any length of period. If a customer is not satisfied with the goods or services provided by a plc they can go elsewhere; moreover, a plc is under no obligation to provide goods or services for a particular interest group and probably would not do so if it felt it would be unprofitable. Such market conditions do not exist in local government. However, if the term customer is difficult to define with any great precision, the word consult can be equally ambiguous and is often misleading. A dictionary definition (McLeod, 1991, p. 209) provides the following guidance: to ask for advice; to
Several corporate plans included an identical section entitled ‘Managing and Resourcing the Strategy’ in which five target groups and their involvement in the planning process were identified. One of these target groups was labelled ‘citizens/group/community’ and involvement was deemed to be through ‘consulting and involving the community and publication of an annual report based on the Best Value Performance Plan and including a report on the previous year’s performance’ (see, for example, North Down Borough Council, 2002, p. 41). However the method of consultation and involvement, beyond satisfaction surveys, was not always specified and it is doubtful whether large numbers of stakeholders read any of the documents listed.

Some local authorities did specify how they intended to consult with and involve the community, but if these various methods are not being measured to see the impact on future decision-making could they be interpreted as nothing more than token gestures, engaged in to legitimise their own continued existence? As Meyer and Scott (1992) point out, the complexity of local government structures, their relationship to funding, oversight and central government agencies make these types of organisation particularly susceptible to a need for legitimacy in relation to their external controlling environment. The level of interaction with that environment will therefore be analysed using Freeman’s three-point scale of rational, process and transactional engagement. If a local authority had merely identified the fact that it has to consult with its stakeholders, that would equate to rational, if consultation appears to have become part of its operating procedures, that would equate to process and finally, if, as desired, councils are actually measuring consultation and displaying the results in their BVPPA’s, this would equate to transactional, the highest form of stakeholder engagement within Freeman’s analytical model. Due to the fact the measuring satisfaction is prescribed this alone will not constitute a process or transactional level engagement, however it is clearly part of a local authority’s operating procedures.

The level of interaction alongside some examples of actions that fall into all three categories are summarised in Table 2. As can be seen, 19 (76 per cent) local authorities have made consultation part of their working practices with six (24 per cent) measuring either levels of consultation or improvements in the general level of usage or awareness. However, 25 (100 per cent) of the local authorities were identified as engaging at the relational level, involving stakeholder identification, along with a representation of the nature of the relationship between the stakeholder and the organisation.

Ballymena Borough Council, which had relevant measurements in three main areas: perception of council and communication with residents, staff training and communications and community relations, provided one of the best examples of a transactional level of consultation. Extracts from its Best Value Report are provided in Table 3. Elsewhere other local authorities were not as comprehensive, as they were only measuring consultation in certain areas, for example the establishment of a database of consultees, the setting up and monitoring of focus groups or the identification and implementation of appropriate consultation procedures. In some cases the measurement in a consultation process was limited to, for example one authority stated that it has as a target ‘increased numbers of female/disabled users at a golf club’. This had evidently come from some form of consultation where members of these groups had stated that they felt excluded from a certain sporting activity.

Although Table 3 provides a snapshot of the kind of work being done in Ballymena Borough Council to improve consultation and make their service delivery as inclusive as possible, it cannot be said that it is the other local authorities that are at a transactional level are consulting with all stakeholders about all decisions being taken on the design and delivery of council services. As stated previously such an activity, even in a fairly limited environment such as NI, is both impractical and unfeasible. Local authorities only have limited resources and cannot use up large amounts of money and staff time with endless consultation that will eventually reach a...
decision that upsets the least amount of people. Some form of qualification has to be placed around the term 'consult' as a local authority has such a wide range of ever-changing stakeholders, for example potential tourists, that it cannot hope to even make them all aware of decisions being taken. Ballamena is probably typical of many other local authorities in that it does the best it can with the resources it has at its disposal and consults with as many stakeholders as practically possible.

Conclusions
After some initial signs of support, many feel that the Best value initiative introduced by the Labour government in 1999 has become too cumbersome and resource intensive for local authorities all over the UK. The expected freedoms after 18 years of a Conservative administration have not materialised and councils have been inundated with a number of reforms. One of the cornerstones of Best Value was the need to consult with a local authority’s various stakeholders in order to ensure that service provision really did reflect the needs of the community it served. Stakeholders are defined by Freeman (1984) as those that either have an effect on the achievement of an organisation’s objectives or are affected by them, thus both types are relevant to local authorities where stakeholders are entitled to services whether or not they make any contribution to their provision in the form of taxation or rates or vote at local elections. Consultation has been very hard to put into practice with any great effect as, even in NI where the population is not particularly diverse, a council has such a large number of stakeholders it is impractical to consult with them all about policy decisions. Freeman (1998) has identified three levels of stakeholder interaction: rational, process and transactional. A document content analysis has revealed that all of the local authorities in NI are engaging in this process at a stakeholder identification level, with a clear majority (76 per cent) having further made consultation part of their standard operating procedures; with regard to the measuring of results, evidence was less persuasive. It was found that this process had begun, but with only a significant minority (24 per cent) engaging in this type of activity and therefore interacting at the transactional level. It has to be stated however, that in all cases this was to a fairly limited degree and no local authority was measuring consultation with all possible stakeholders. Perhaps this is a manifestation of the ‘messiness’ suggested by Carrimichael (2002) that exists between government and policy in Britain. Local authorities in NI may be simply engaging in what Meyer and Rowan (1977) term as ‘tagacious conformity,’ the organisation portraying itself as tidy and orderly to maintain its position and to continue to survive (Lapsley and Palicot, 2000). With regard to Best Value and its operations, these points are, as yet, unproven, though there are encouraging signs that local authorities are making progress towards engaging with their stakeholders in a way they had not been previously. As Mower (2001) notes, the challenge facing local government will be deciding how to pursue Best Value without sacrificing the interests of any of its stakeholders, though in reality it would be extremely difficult to make decisions that satisfy the wide range of stakeholders that a local authority has.

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### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>References to Consultation and Stakeholders in Corporate Plan</th>
<th>Number of councils (percentage out of 25)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Section of Corporate Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mission Statement</td>
<td>3 (12%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vision</td>
<td>7 (28%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>20 (80%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aims</td>
<td>5 (20%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Objectives</td>
<td>18 (72%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Targets/action plans (not performance indicators)</td>
<td>11 (44%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>SWOT</td>
<td>11 (44%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other (e.g. themes, challenges, priorities)</td>
<td>12 (48%)</td>
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### Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Rational</th>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Transactional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of councils</td>
<td>25 (100%)</td>
<td>19 (76%)</td>
<td>6 (24%)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Rational</th>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Transactional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The council will endeavour to consult with the users only of its services</td>
<td>Measuring satisfaction</td>
<td>Consulting as to which services are deemed to be important, then measuring satisfaction and calculating differential. Process repeated every 2 years to monitor process</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The council is to consult with a wide range of bodies so that its decisions are representative of local people</td>
<td>Improved communication (one-way process only)</td>
<td>Moving to a higher quartile (NI average) with regard to consultation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Setting up of focus groups with no target</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To build on existing relationships with community groups (no target)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Regular attendance at the meetings of the majority of representative bodies in the region (no measurements)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consulting as to which services are deemed to be important, then measuring satisfaction and calculating differential. Process repeated every 2 years to monitor process</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Moving to a higher quartile (NI average) with regard to consultation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Contact with number of established community groups measured</td>
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Table 3
Examples of Transactional Level Consultation by one Local Authority

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area 1: Perception of council and communication with residents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>NI average</th>
<th>Target 2003</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provision of good information</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Top quartile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 responsiveness to needs of local people</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Top quartile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good communication with residents</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Top quartile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair treatment of all local people</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>Top quartile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultation about budget expenditure</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Top quartile</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area 2: Staff training and communications</th>
<th>Progress</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Achieved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improve internal communications with centre</td>
<td>Hold weekly management meetings with staff</td>
<td>Actioned</td>
<td>Achieved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet all staff via full staff meetings every 12 weeks</td>
<td>Actioned</td>
<td>Achieved</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure core brief and local brief is communicated to all staff</td>
<td>Actioned</td>
<td>Achieved</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area 3: Community relations</th>
<th>Projects measures</th>
<th>Performance results</th>
<th>Performance measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To ensure that all Council decisions on the design and delivery of services adequately consider the potential implications for:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>people in different racial groups and people from different cultural traditions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To support and advise locally based projects, which encourage a positive awareness of difference and diversity both between and within communities</td>
<td>Work in partnership with others to initiate and support projects that challenge negative stereotypes which sustain division and conflict and explore identities and culture in a manner which promotes inclusive division and debate</td>
<td>Composition and representativeness of the partnerships formed/enabled to discuss these issues</td>
<td>Programme sponsored Popular Belief Exhibition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To support and advise locally based projects, which encourage a positive awareness of difference and diversity both between and within communities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Grant to aid community forum with appointment of borough ethnic minorities co-ordinator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ballymena Borough Council (2002)