



# Reaching for the Stars – The Politics of Performance Assessment

Presentation  
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# Back to the future



- Dr Cartwright:  
“It’s a basic scientific approach....”
- The Minister:  
“ This is fantastic..”

# Back to the future



- The Civil Servant

“ Dangerous  
nonsense...frightfully  
careful before starting  
telling them how to  
do the job”

# What happened next: policy level

## SOCIAL SERVICES

- Nov 1998: *Modernising Social Services* - Targets and central monitoring
- 1999: *A new approach to Social Services performance* – introduced PAF, first data published October 1999
- 2002: ARMs process and first publications of star rating
- 2003: Star ratings formally linked to sanctions and rewards
- 2004: CSCI takes over PAF regime – pledge to put users at the centre

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT

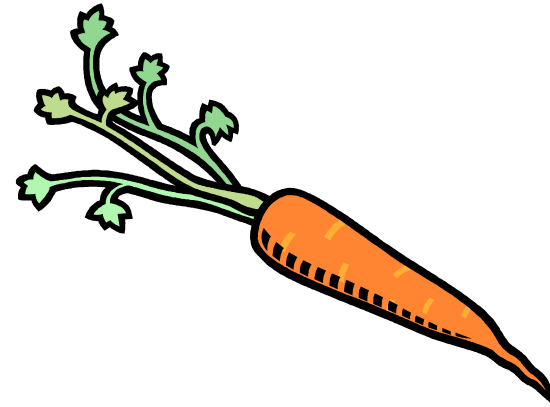
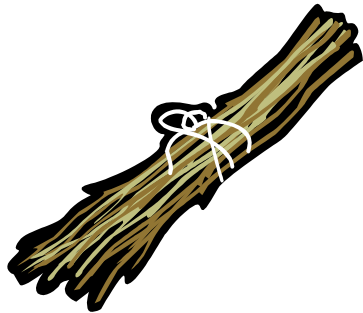
- March 1998: *Modernising local government – Best Value*
- 2001: *Strong leadership* signals introduction of CPA from 2002
- 2002: CPA published
- 2004: Govm'nt announces reduction in central targets; Audit Commission emphasises self assessment and shift to area wide assessment

# What happened next: underpinning development

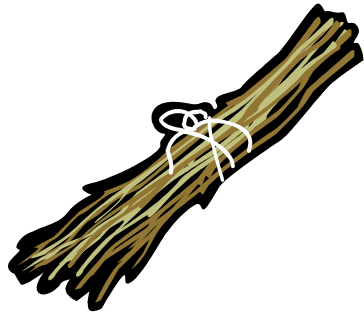


- SSI develops evidence data base (PADI) with three streams of evidence
  - Performance data from PIs
  - Bi-annual self- monitoring
  - Inspections and Joint Reviews
  
- Development of the Annual Review process

# Messages from the top



# Sticks



- 2001

Alan Milburn publicly slates the worst 14 performers based on their position in the league table

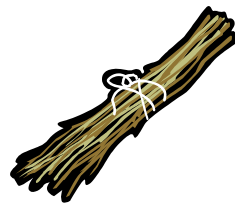
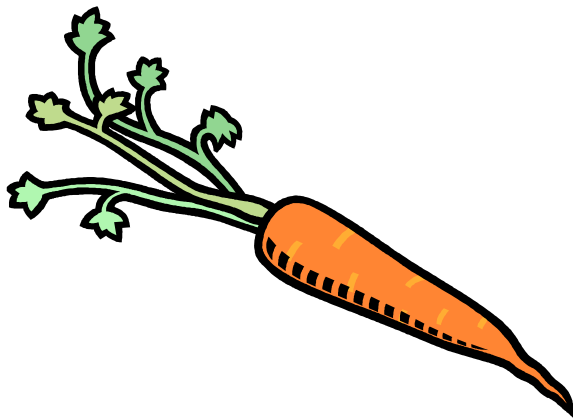
# Carrots and sticks

- 2002

*“Those councils that get the highest star ratings will get significant freedoms:... The better you do, the more you get” **BUT***

*“Where social services are persistently in trouble and failing to deliver... central government can not stand idly by”*

*Alan Milburn*





# Time for celebration

- 2003, 2004



*“ All Social services staff working for councils that have made progress in their star ratings should be praised for their efforts”*

*John Reid Nov 2003*

*“ Today we should celebrate the improvements in social services..*

*Margaret Hodge, Stephen Ladyman  
2004*

# The velvet revolution

- 2005

*“We are concerned that too many people are stuck in the comfort zone... we would be **wanting to understand** why people are continuing with a slow trajectory of improvement.. Next year we will be challenging the issue of councils being happy to be average”*

*David Behan Nov 2004*



# The Critique



1. Erosion of local autonomy
2. Methodology – robustness, ethics, validity
3. Perverse incentives and consequences

# Erosion of local autonomy



- Legitimising central intervention

*“We will not tolerate poor performance or failing councils. They let down the people they are elected to serve. They tarnish the reputation of the rest of local government.” Nick Raynsford 2002*

- The response from ‘Thames Marsh’

*“What makes you think you can come swanning down here from Whitehall telling us how to run our borough”*

# Erosion of local autonomy



- LGA strongly critical of target culture and erosion of local autonomy
- The Devolved Decision Making Review (2004): “greater scope for locally determined outcomes and methods of delivery”  
BUT  
“with national powers as a backstop”
- A matter of *plus ca change?*

# Methodology/ Evidence base



- Robustness
  - Performance indicators
  - Star ratings
- Validity
- Ethics

# Robustness



- PIs – the devil in the detail
- Star-ratings process – producing a *condensed* rather than *partial* picture
- System gaining more acceptance

*“The star ratings system brings together the range of monitoring and inspection type activity – it’s helpful”*  
*Tony Hunter ADSS*

# Validity

- The nature of knowledge
  - The politics of evaluation
  - Cause and effect
  - Understanding what works
- Making outcomes analysis a reality
  - The impact of process
  - Return of the researchers



## The Children in Need User Experience Survey – quest for information versus good research practice?

- SSRG:
  - Unlikely to return valid information
  - Potential to put some service users at risk or harm
  - Going against core principles of the Research Governance Framework
- CSCI:
  - Endorses the survey
  - Will give “some potentially valuable information”

# Perverse incentives and unintended consequences



The case of the hospital with 500 administrators and no doctors nurses or patients

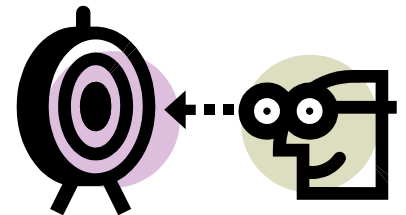
Mrs. Rogers: *"Minister, it is one of the best run hospitals in the country. It is up for the Florence Nightingale Award."*

Jim Hacker: *"And what is that?"*

Mrs. Rogers: *"It is won by the most hygienic hospital in the area."*

# Perverse incentives

- Almost inevitable that some will “play the system”
- Gaming: Preoccupation with particular indicators turning attention away from other failing services
- Corner cutting to get the ‘right’ results
- Hitting the target but missing the point



# Unintended consequences



- Effect on staff recruitment and morale
- Publicly labelling failure
- Creating a blame culture
- Setting yourself up for failure – unrealistic targets
- Proposed Audit commission study “The impact of targets”

# Star ratings and service improvement

## The belief from the top:

- *“Star ratings are driving improvements in social care services, helping make real improvements in people’s lives locally,”* *John Reid, Margaret Hodge and Stephen Ladyman*
- *“Councils can only improve once they own up to and face up to the performance issues they need to address”.* *Averil Nottage, Acting Chief Inspector*
- *“I believe the story of continued improvement is real...it’s not so much that star ratings drive performance, as the effort to deliver on the range of national and local priorities which together combine to form the star ratings”* *Tony Hunter, ADSS*

# Secrets of success



## Views of improving councils:

- Key message: Support the front line
- Other ingredients of success
  - Investment in commissioning strategies
  - Investment in preventative services
  - Strong emphasis on partnership
  - Support from politicians
  - Corporate support
  - Focus on culture and processes

# Secrets of success



## The case of Direct Payments

- The simplistic approach
  - Appoint new staff to sign up clients
- The strategic approach
  - Train staff to make it part of standard practice
  - Develop comprehensive policies, procedures and contracts
  - Develop effective support structure

# Views from the operational end



- General views

- Measuring performance is right
- Everyone *wants* to provide a good service
- The principle is right – but the ‘how’ needs increased clarity and development
- The system must not endanger staff morale



# Views from the operational end



## ● Suggestions for development

- More precise definitions to ensure consistency
- Slimming down of indicator set
- Avoidance of ‘mixed’ indicators
- Avoidance of ‘satisfaction’ indicators which make no distinction between who has delivered the service
- Recognise that recruitment and retention is the lynchpin
- Give credit to all areas where there is good practice

# Making PIs meaningful at the front line



- Golden thread or golden threat?
  - “*Get that PI up!*”- performance culture experienced as just more ‘top-down’ pressure
  - OR
  - The ‘one minute rule’
  - Team self-audit framework (*Mike Evans*)
    - » Agreeing desired outcomes (incl. the impact of process)
    - » Agreeing indicators of good practice
    - » Team self analysis
  - Focus on strengths as well as problems

# The user voice



- The acid test

- have users noticed any difference?
- have users contributed to setting the agenda for performance improvement?

# The user voice

- How user views contribute to the evidence base
  - The inspection process actively seeks the views of users
  - User satisfaction indicators introduced from 2002
  - Through DIS councils asked to provide examples of practice changes resulting from consultation with users
  - User led organisations have defended some PIs
  - CSCI pledge to put users centre stage
- Scope for improvement: Monitor user experience routinely?

# Where does this leave us

## A political roller coaster

- From gasps of horror to gradual acceptance
- Positive track record in terms of debate and development – but central government still calling the shots
- More and mostly better information about services
- Not enough about outcomes for users - but CSCI pledge to put users centre stage
- The “bonfire of quangos” – farewell CSCI
- Survival of the star ratings?
- The 10,000 moments of truth



# Back to the beginning



- Central direction versus local autonomy – a service user’s comment:

*“Why is there so much difference? If social services in one place are doing something right, why aren’t others doing it? Social services who are not doing it shouldn’t be able to say ‘we don’t want to do it’ ”*