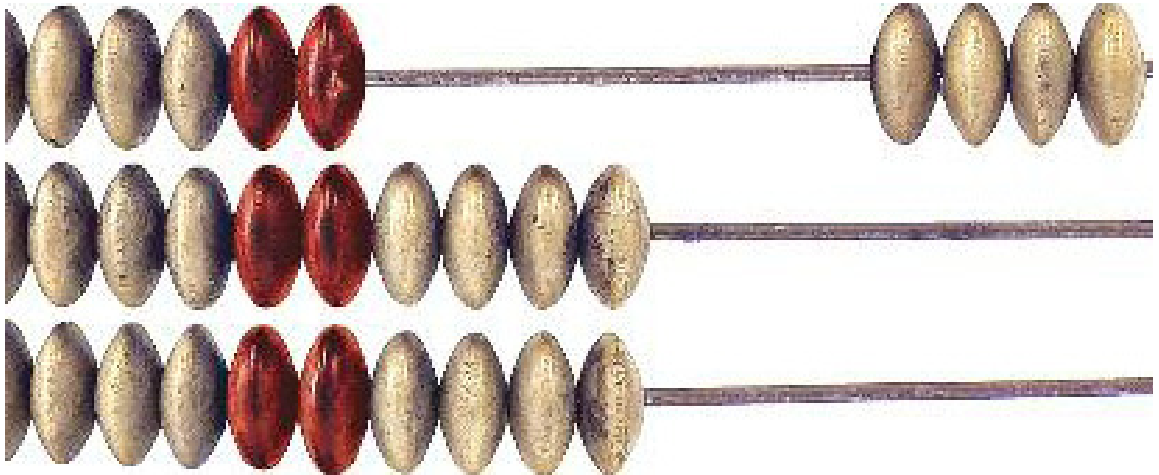


Provider Benchmarking for Support Services



Frequently Asked Questions

August 2009

Q: How is it different from other benchmarking tools?

A: It is set up for providers to enable them to compare their information on cost, quality, performance and user satisfaction to that of anonymised, comparable other services. It compares actual costs rather than contract price.

Q: What “service” am I benchmarking?

A: This benchmarking is of your housing related support service – i.e. the service as defined by your contract with the Supporting People team (or alternatively named equivalent) of your local authority. It may be one project/scheme or a group of schemes or be defined by numbers of units or hours. If you are unsure, check how it is defined for your performance reports to the authority. It will not include housing management, care, treatment, education or other separately funded service.

Q: What about jointly funded services?

A: Where the support service is commissioned and funded jointly to provide an integrated service, e.g. where Adult Social Care and the Supporting People authorities commission a combined care and support service, this can be included where the service collects the performance reporting and Quality Assessment Framework data which will be benchmarked.

Q: How should I use the data internally and externally?

A: The data will provide you with facts on how your service compares with others in the support services market. It supports your own reviews of your service improvement and value for money. Figures are presented in a way that Boards and senior management teams can easily interpret and use to inform the strategic decision making of your organisation. Many organisations use the figures in contract price negotiations with commissioners.

Q: How much work is involved in taking part?

A: The tool is designed to make use of data already collected for your contract monitoring and management accounts so you just need to pull together information you already have rather than set up new recording systems. The questionnaires are spreadsheets for which a basic level knowledge of excel is required. The feedback we have received from previous participants is that most find the data collection easy and the written Guidance helpful.

Q: For which period of time should the data be submitted?

A: This benchmarking is of actual costs, performance, etc. so it should be for the last period for which you have completed management accounts. If your organisation’s financial year ends 31 March, this will be for April 08 – March 09. If your organisation uses a different accounting year, use the accounts for the last full year available. So that you have a coherent picture of your service, the performance indicators, quality scores and user satisfaction figures should be for the same period.

Q: My contract is defined by the number of Support Hours a week I must provide but does not define the number of Units. How do I complete Question 3.1?

A: Please complete with the number of units you would normally expect to support at any one time or the average number supported at any one time over the year in question.

Q: My service began or was substantially reconfigured part way through 08-09, can I still submit data?

A: If you have enough information to multiply up, or extrapolate from the data you have, to enable you to calculate figures for the year which give a realistic and meaningful picture of the service, then do so.

Q: Can I benchmark the different services in my own organisation?

A: You can. You would need to let us know you wanted this so we could run you a specific report, which would be done at no extra cost. Otherwise comparator groups are selected so that they do not include your own services.

Q: Is the service suitable for sheltered housing?

A: Yes, many sheltered housing providers participate. As well as the service types of sheltered and very sheltered housing, floating support services will be sub-divided by client group so that appropriate comparator groups can be identified.

Q: My staffing arrangements are not covered by the list in the drop down box at Question 2.7 can I add a new description?

A: The list of definitions for the staffing arrangements in schemes defined in the drop down box is limited to enable us to provide all participants with a reasonable number of comparators. If none of the definitions provided exactly describe the level of service you provide please choose the definition that would provide you with the best comparative information.

Q: We provide a Community Alarm Service in a non Sheltered Scheme. Can we include this cost in the separate cell at 3.6?

A: No this specifically for sheltered housing services. If the Alarm service is integral to the provision of the housing related support service the cost should be included in the Non-Staff Scheme Costs.

Q: How do I know that all participants are submitting comparable information, e.g. I know that not everyone defines overheads in the same way?

A: The Guidance gives clear instructions on completing the form. This Guidance has been refined as a result of four years experience of providing this service. It includes detailed definitions for all the categorisation used and we also refer participants to the definitions used in the Supporting People Performance Workbooks where relevant.

Q: I only want to compare my service to ones exactly like it. Can you guarantee that?

A: Comparator groups are selected by service type, cover type, client group and region. If from among the services submitted, the search for comparator groups does not find a perfect match, the search is extended to "nearest neighbours". The extent to which we find perfect matches depends on how many services of the different types have been submitted. In previous years the service has provided direct comparator groups for all the major service types. If you provide a very specialist service you may get a national comparator group rather than a regional one.

Q: My organisation has services in Wales/Scotland. Can I include them?

A: The benchmarking tool uses data collected by providers for the English Supporting People monitoring systems. If you can provide this data, it may be possible to submit your service but we would need to explore this with you and establish what region was your economic “nearest neighbour”. The service has been successfully adapted to include Northern Ireland providers.

Q: How do I find out more about information submitted by other participants?

A: All organisations who take part are assured of confidentiality. In the report you receive, your comparators will be identified only by a letter. Performance indicators are headline figures and sharing information about how you achieve those results is a valuable next step. We will facilitate participants making contact with each other but can only do this where we have their written consent. Information on how to set up a benchmarking club is available from our website here:

<http://www.sitra.org.uk/index.php?id=897>