

## **The role of relationship managers and appointed auditors**

The role of the Relationship Manager (RM) draws its powers from the Local Government Act 1999, Part 1, section 10. Welsh Assembly Government circular 28/2005, requires the Wales Audit Office to appoint Relationship Managers (RMs) who are responsible for identifying and co-ordinating effectively, as far as is practicable, all regulation and inspection activity at their local authority sites. The principles that underpin that guidance include a requirement that regulators “*work together, to co-ordinate inspection activity in support of continuous improvement*”.

Joint reviews are part of a national programme of reviews of social services and are integrated as closely as possible with the annual Wales Programme for Improvement (WPI) cycle. The performance evaluation, joint risk assessment and improvement plans form key parts of the advance information and the completed joint review informs the risk assessment and improvement priorities for the following year. As such, they are not directly based in local risk assessments, although responsive to them. RMs and appointed auditors will be notified in advance of the proposed programme of reviews.

In overall terms, the roles of the RM and auditors can be summarised as follows:

- preparing the regulatory plan to take account of the joint review;
- contributing contextual information about each authority to the advance information and helping to complete the template;
- briefing the joint review team before they commence each joint review;
- providing a source of local knowledge and support during the review;
- overseeing handover arrangements following the joint review; and
- working with the joint review team to agree appropriate follow up arrangements.

## **Preparing the regulatory plan**

The RM will ensure that the joint review is included in the regulatory plan and will ensure that other planned regulatory work takes account of the burden that the joint review will place on the authority's capacity. For some authorities this may cover two regulatory plans (depending on when the joint review commences) to allow the authority to prepare its advance information prior to the review or prepare and implement its action plan after the review. The RM will liaise with all regulators to ensure that their planned work does not place an unnecessary burden on the authority, and that the regulatory programme is co-ordinated effectively.

It should be noted that the programme of joint reviews will be set out in advance. It is not possible to amend the programme, although some minor changes to on site dates may be accommodated in order to take account of specific local circumstances. This means that forward planning is essential so as to ensure that the authority has the capacity to cope with planned regulatory work from all agencies.

## **Regulatory calendars**

The audit and inspection programme established in the regulatory plan is detailed in a regulatory calendar that sets out the proposed timings of individual pieces of work during the year so that overlaps and potential pressure points can be identified. The WAO, in consultation with other regulators, updates and issues the calendar for each authority on a quarterly basis to ensure that any agreed changes in the timing of activities during the year are recorded.

For local authority sites where joint reviews are being undertaken, changes in the timing of other activities will, as far as possible, be sensitive to any capacity constraints or other local circumstances.

## **Completing contextual information in the advance information template**

The advance information template is completed jointly by the local authority, WAO, SSIW and the joint review team. It replaces the position statement used in the first round of joint reviews.

RMs and appointed auditors will draw on existing information and data to complete sections of the template that describe the context of each authority.

These sections are:

- political and management arrangements;
- political control;
- details of corporate structure;
- summary of corporate vision and priorities;
- summary of relevant regulatory work;
- budget and financial management information;
- performance management arrangements

## **Briefing the joint review team**

In order to facilitate the effective preparation of the advance information, RMs and appointed auditors will brief joint review staff to enable them to identify and include appropriate, evidenced information.

The advance information template replaces the position statement prepared by the local authority alone. In the second round of joint reviews in Wales, as much information as possible will be prepared on the basis of information and data already known to SSIW, WAO and other regulators. RMs and appointed auditors will have a key role in advising the team what information is available and where. This can then be set out in the advance information template before it is passed to the local authority for checking its validity.

An issues analysis meeting involving the joint review team and relevant WAO staff will be held before the start of the review. The RM and/or the appointed

auditor will attend this meeting to ensure that the team is fully apprised of relevant information and to advise it of any local circumstances that will have a bearing on the conduct of the review. The RM and/or the appointed auditor will also attend a meeting of other regulators and inspectors which will take place before the broad phase fieldwork.

The RM and appointed auditor will attend the interim assessment and risk analysis meeting at the end of the broad review phase. In this meeting, the joint review team seeks to:

- establish the extent of reliable evidence already gathered,
- highlight any gaps in the evidence that need to be filled, by reference to the areas for examination set out in the judgement criteria (see Section 0.6 in the Handbook);
- make a provisional assessment of relative strengths and weaknesses;
- determine the areas of focus for the main fieldwork on the basis of a risk analysis.

### **Support during the review**

During the course of each review and when analysing the evidence, the review team may need to consult the RM or appointed auditor to clarify certain information and gain a further perspective on issues that have been identified.

Authority RMs or appointed auditors will not be required to participate in the fieldwork of the joint review. If an Audit Manager is needed to contribute to the joint review team's work, appropriate personnel will be allocated by WAO.

### **Handover arrangements**

Once the report has been agreed and published, the review team will meet with the RM (or his/her nominee) and the authority to agree arrangements for monitoring implementation of the action plan. This handover meeting is the point at which responsibility passes from the lead reviewer to the RM and

appointed auditor. They will ensure that there is clarity about the way forward and responsibility for follow-up arrangements.

### **Follow-up arrangements**

Following the joint review, the RM will ensure that appropriate follow up arrangements are agreed and in place. This work may be carried out by the authority's auditors and/or SSIW. The scope and nature of the follow-up work will be agreed in the light of:

- the review findings, (especially the impact upon service users and carers of the areas identified in the report as in need of development);
- the discussion at the handover meeting
- the effectiveness of the local authority's own arrangements for monitoring progress
- the level of political concern.

RMs and appointed auditors will ensure that the follow up arrangements are co-ordinated with other regulatory work and are included in the regulatory plan. There is usually a degree of flexibility about the timing of follow up work. Consideration should be given to the length of time needed for the authority to demonstrate that it is delivering the action plan and that the desired outcomes are being achieved.

An especially poor judgement in either of the two main dimensions used for judging performance in joint reviews (*how good are the services?* and *how well placed is the authority to sustain and improve performance?*) will trigger consideration of:

- whether there are grounds for serious concerns and, therefore,
- a need to put into effect the agreed protocol for intervention.

In these circumstances, the RM and appointed auditors will be kept fully informed.