



4 Measuring Service Performance

Community Mediation Guides

These booklets cover a range of issues related to the setting up and running of community mediation services in Scotland, as well as broader issues in community conflict resolution.

sacro



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Introduction

This guide is the fourth in a series of six which cover a range of issues related to the setting up and running of community mediation services. Although hard to quantify exactly (most local authorities do not keep comprehensive records on complaints), evidence seems to indicate a significant rise in the incidence of neighbour disputes and the resulting challenge presented to social housing providers and other agencies.

The Sacro guides were originally part of a broader initiative by Sacro and the then Scottish Executive to assist social housing providers in developing the provision of mediation across Scotland to assist in meeting this challenge.

Scottish Community Mediation Centre

The Scottish Community Mediation Centre (SCMC) provides high quality training and consultancy work in the fields of community mediation, constructive conflict resolution and restorative practice.

SCMC is managed by Sacro. We provide services to a wide range of national, international and local government agencies as well as bodies such as charities, social housing providers and police.

The Centre acts as the administrative base for the Scottish Community Mediation Network and its accreditation schemes.

We offer a range of resources on all issues around constructive conflict resolution in neighbourhoods.

Training, advice, guidance and assistance are available to mediation services, social landlords, and all other agencies concerned with neighbourhood conflict.

1. Community Mediation

Community mediation is a widespread and well-established tool for dispute resolution, with hundreds of community mediation centres operating both in the UK and the rest of the world. In Scotland alone, thousands of neighbour disputes have been handled by mediators, most involving two sets of neighbours, but some involving whole neighbourhoods of fifty to a hundred or more households. Community mediation in Scotland has its own stringent accreditation schemes for services, mediators and mediation training.

Community mediation services deal with a wide range of neighbour disputes, including issues around noise (normally around 50% of all cases), children, boundaries, use of common areas, abusive behaviour, vehicles, rubbish and pets. The disputes resolved by mediation range from the seemingly trivial and short-lived (although trivial disputes can often get out of hand), to those which are serious and chronic, making the lives of all involved a misery and taxing the resources of the police, housing officers, social workers and other public agencies.

Mediation works according to the following principles:

- > Mediators are impartial – rather than representing the interests of one party they are there to help both parties reach a mutually agreed settlement.
- > The mediation process gives both parties the opportunity to be fully heard, and to hear the other side of the story.
- > Mediators do not pass judgement or impose solutions. The parties to a dispute are encouraged to voluntarily take responsibility for finding a practical solution to their own problems; although mediators will assist in exploring whether all the issues have been covered and whether an agreement is liable to hold.
- > The dispute is not aired in public – mediation is a private process involving only the mediators and the parties to the dispute, and mediators act under a code of confidentiality.
- > An important part of the mediator's job is to identify and help resolve the underlying causes of a conflict as well as the symptoms – this means that any agreements reached are more likely to lead to long-term solutions.
- > While mediation usually involves discussion of issues around past events, its main focus is on what is going to happen and how people will behave towards one another in the future.
- > Because mediation is informal it can be a quick and comparatively cheap method of resolving disputes.

2. Why Measure Performance?

In the current climate of public funding where ‘Best Value’, value for money, and targeting have become basic considerations in any form of service planning, it may seem redundant to ask why we should measure performance. The simple answer would seem to be ‘because we are required to prove to our funders that we are worth the money.’

Measurement of performance, though, is not simply an exercise in justification to those who hold the purse strings; it is an essential exercise for any organisation that wants to reflect on its practice and continually improve it. The following are just some of the reasons for measuring performance:

- > To check whether the service is meeting its aims and objectives.
- > To collect data in order to satisfy funders that targets are being achieved.
- > To ensure stakeholders are satisfied with the service’s performance.
- > To ensure the service is reaching the client group it is aimed at.
- > To collect data which will improve internal decision-making and planning.
- > To review professional practice and procedure for its strengths and weaknesses.
- > To monitor equal opportunities practice.
- > To measure individual performance within the service.
- > To identify training needs within the service.
- > To review performance against that of similar services.

In short, measurement of performance should be an essential part of all aspects of an organisation’s work, both in delivering and tuning current services, and planning for new initiatives.

3. Measuring Community Mediation Services

On first consideration, measurement of the activities of community mediation services seems problematic. Mediation sets out to intervene in situations of conflict and to help people resolve that conflict in a practical, peaceful and constructive manner. This frequently means that the mediator is faced with issues of communication, relationships, feelings and perceptions - things that are not easy to quantify. How, for instance, do you measure the success of an intervention in a case where there are several issues involving several people? In terms of the occurrence or non-occurrence of future incidents? In terms of the resolution of the presenting issues? Or in terms of how those involved in the conflict feel about things after the service’s intervention?

These are valid difficulties, but they are not insurmountable, and they certainly do not amount to a justification for rejecting measurement of community mediation services outright. Although it is clearly not possible to measure levels of resolution in conflict intervention with the same accuracy and certainty as outputs in manufacturing or financial services, there is still a considerable amount of invaluable information that can be, and has been, reliably gathered. Moreover, it is not only outcomes of mediation cases which should be of concern to services; every aspect of a service's activity can - and should - be the subject of measurement.

4. Types Of Measurement

4.1 Which Approach?

There are many different types of measurement and evaluation of service output, and it is beyond the scope of this guide to explore all of them. The following evaluative approaches, taken from J Dignan's chapter on evaluation in 'Community And Neighbour Mediation' (editor Liebmann M, Cavendish, 1998) are likely to be the most directly applicable to mediation services:

4.2 Programme Effectiveness Analysis

Here the focus is on whether a service is meeting its targets and aims and objectives, usually as set by the service itself and/or its funders. Measurements of caseloads, types of case, outcomes, referral sources and costs per case are likely to be carried out, with the main aim usually being to assess and improve the quality of the service and generate information for funders and stakeholders. Because the means of recording and evaluating such data are not universally standard, comparisons with other services may not always be easy.

4.3 Comparative Impact Analysis

This aims to compare the impact on clients of two or more different types of intervention. A council may for instance wish to compare the comparative success rates of interventions by its housing officers and interventions by mediators in neighbour disputes. The difficulties of non-standard data are even greater in this approach, compounded by the fact that the aims and nature of the interventions to be compared may be so different as to make the business of comparison complex, uncertain and costly.

4.4 Cost Benefit Analysis

Here, the main question is whether the outputs or outcomes of a service provide value for money; do they justify the expenditure necessary to provide the service? Applying cost benefit analysis to community mediation, or indeed to most forms of social intervention, is controversial and fraught with difficulty. Outputs from such interventions do not have an easily measured monetary value, as measurement of the effects of the intervention may involve a number of different agencies. In the case of community mediation, interventions may result in savings to housing providers, police, and medical services. It is difficult to see how these savings could be calculated systematically.

4.5 Conclusion

From the above it can be seen that for everyday measurement of service outputs, Programme Effectiveness Analysis is likely to be the most practical model to adopt. It is unlikely that either of the two other models can be adopted by a service without specialist external help, and the consequent costs. This does not mean that there is not a place in the measurement of community mediation services for Comparative Impact Analysis or even Cost Benefit Analysis, but such exercises are more suitable for time-limited specific pieces of research by skilled researchers rather than by services in their regular day-to-day work.

5. Measurement Tools

There is a range of tools available to collect data, and their selection will, of course, depend on what is to be measured and for what purpose. The following are some of the main methods of data collection:

- > **Internal Records** – Information that is currently available is obviously the easiest to collect. Case activities and correspondence as logged on case management systems, logs, records of complaints and other internal recording can all yield valuable information with comparatively little effort and expense.
- > **Surveys/questionnaires** – If designed well and carefully targeted, these can be useful sources of information on the views of clients and referring agencies on quality of service and other issues. Information can be gathered via post, telephone, email or other methods such as street surveys or online surveys.
- > **Public Information** – This can be particularly useful for putting into context information gathered in other ways. A wide range of information is gathered by public bodies both locally and nationally on factors such as population, health, crime, household composition and tenure, ethnicity, and economic activity.
- > **Structured Interviews** – Interviews which seek to gain responses to particular sets of pre-defined questions can be useful where information is required in more depth or detail than practical with questionnaires. They are particularly useful in collecting people's considered views or reflections on issues which are not straightforward or easily answered by ticking a box.
- > **Focus Groups** – These are where a group of people (for instance clients, potential clients or representatives of referring agencies) are brought together to discuss and form opinions or proposals on specific topics. They may be particularly useful in generating proposals for improvements to current services or possible new initiatives.
- > **Observation** – It is possible to gain a surprising amount of direct factual information through observation. How often do queues build in reception areas? How often does the telephone remain unanswered? How often are case files online awaiting allocation?

5.1 Selecting the Right Tools

In any form of measurement it is essential to be clear not only about what is to be measured but why it is to be measured, and what effect the measurement will have. If a service is seeking to establish the average length of time of a case, for instance, it would be possible to collect information by sending out a survey to all clients over the past two years. The accuracy of the information collected, however,

would be open to question (people may not remember), and the effort of collection would be substantial; it would be far simpler and more accurate to collect the data from case records. The decision to measure duration of cases should also only be taken for a purpose; is the service likely or able to act on the information once it is collected? Will the new information help to improve the service's performance?

Equally important is consideration of how disruptive any measurement will be on service delivery. It is possible to put so much effort into accurately measuring every aspect of your work that there is little time left for the actual work! The following should be considered in selecting measurement tools:

- > What is the value of the information gained compared to the time and financial resources you will have to be commit?
- > How disruptive to your service and to clients will the process of measurement be?
- > Will the information gathered assist in improving your service delivery?
- > Are you able to gather/interpret the information internally in an unbiased way, or should you seek external assistance?
- > Is the measurement tool you select sufficiently accurate/specific for the purpose? (Are you looking for quantitative verifiable data, or qualitative person-centred data?)
- > Do you require a continuous measurement process (e.g. case levels) or a snapshot (e.g. whether a one-off advertising campaign has been successful)?
- > Is the information you are gathering sensitive, and if so, is the measurement tool capable of being used in a relatively non-intrusive way?
- > Can the measurement tool guarantee anonymity if required and meet the service's data protection policy?

6. What Can Be Measured?

6.1 Service Functions

All aspects of a community mediation service's activities can and should be measured, but not at the same time. It is important that measurement is planned and phased. One means of doing this is to draw up a Service Evaluation Plan covering a period of 1-3 years, describing what is to be measured, how often, and why. It may be useful to categorise measurements as follows:

- > **Continuous Measurement:** Aspects of the service's operation requiring continuous measurement, such as statistics on cases (numbers, success rates etc).
- > **Periodic Measurement:** Aspects of the service's operation which you decide should be monitored at intervals (public awareness of service, some client demographic profiling etc.).
- > **One-off Measurement:** Single measurements which are not planned to be repeated (e.g. measurement of particular pieces of work).

The following sections classify functions of community mediation services into seven headings, giving suggestions for specific areas to be measured and indications of possible suitable tools of measurement for each. Neither the list of functions nor the list of measurement tools is exhaustive.

6.2 Services to Clients

| Area of Activity | Measurement Tool |
|--|---|
| Response time to written/e-mail enquiries | Observation log, examination of online case records |
| Response time to phone enquiries | Observation log |
| Hours office open | Observation log |
| Disabled access | Internal/specialist audit |
| Client satisfaction with access and response times | Postal/phone/in person survey |
| Client satisfaction with mediators and the mediation process | Postal/phone/in person survey, complaints procedures, structured interviews |

6.3 Client Profiles

| Area of Activity | Measurement Tool |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Area of residence | Examination of case records |
| Tenure | Examination of case records |
| Age group, sex | Examination of case records, postal/phone/in person survey |
| Employment/ socio-economic status | Postal/phone/ in person survey |
| Ethnic origin | Examination of case records, postal/phone/ in person survey |
| Health factors | Postal/phone/ in person survey |

6.4 Referrals

| Area of Activity | Measurement Tool |
|--|---|
| Source of agency referrals | Examination of referral records |
| Source of self-referrals | Examination of case records, postal/ phone/in person survey |
| Proportion of referrals accepted as cases | Examination of referral/case records |
| Time between receiving referrals and accepting/ rejecting as cases | Observation log/ examination of referral/ case records |
| Reason for rejection of referrals | Observation log/ examination of referral records |
| Presenting issues | Examination of referral records |

6.5 Cases

| Area of Activity | Measurement Tool |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Total number of cases | Examination of case records |
| Outcome of cases | Examination of case records |
| Improved client communication | Postal/phone survey |
| Classification of issues | Examination of case records |
| Agreements holding after 3/6 months | Postal/phone survey |
| Cases re-opened | Examination of case records |
| Average number of live cases | Examination of case records/caseload log |
| Time taken per case | Observation log/mediator diary/ examination of case records |

6.6 Mediators

| Area of Activity | Measurement Tool |
|----------------------------|---|
| Training received/required | Training log/skills audit/appraisal and supervision records |
| Qualifications | Personnel records/skills audit |
| Average caseload | Examination of case records |
| Average time per case | Observation log/mediator diary/ examination of case records |
| Outcome of cases | Examination of case records |
| Mediator turnover | Personnel records |
| Reasons for leaving | Exit questionnaire/ personnel records |

6.7 Management

| Area of Activity | Measurement Tool |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Meeting of operational targets | Business plan/ service level agreements/ work plans |
| Organisational efficiency | External standards – e.g. Investors in People, SCMN accreditation |
| Governance | Compliance with charitable status requirements, company law, governing documents, charter marks |
| Personnel functions | Staff turnover rates, exit questionnaires, sickness records, grievance + disciplinary records, supervision/appraisal records, internal/external reviews |

6.8 Other Factors

| Area of Activity | Measurement Tool |
|--|---|
| Public awareness/perception of service | Focus groups, postal/phone/in person survey |
| Awareness of service by potential referring agencies | Focus groups, postal/phone/in person survey |
| Effectiveness of advertising | Focus groups, in person survey |

Appendix 1: SCMC Recommended Codes

Recommended Dispute Codes

- > Noise.
- > Children's Behaviour.
- > Racial Harassment.
- > Anti-Social or Abusive Behaviour.
- > Boundary or Property Dispute.
- > Homelessness and Family.
- > Other.

Recommended Outcome Codes

- > Full Agreement/Improvement.
- > No Agreement/No Improvement.

Appendix 2: Feedback

BRIGADOON COMMUNITY MEDIATION SERVICE: PLEASE HELP US TO HELP YOU

You will remember that recently you were working with mediators from our Service. We want to make our Service as useful as possible so we would like you to let us know what you think by completing this form – a stamped-addressed envelope has been included for you to send the completed form back to us.

Please return to:

Brigadoon Community Mediation Service

27 Misty Way, Brigadoon

Tel. (0111) 555 2101

| | | | | |
|---|-----|--------------------------|----|--------------------------|
| 1. Do you feel we responded promptly enough? | YES | <input type="checkbox"/> | NO | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Any comments? | | | | |
| 2. Do you feel you were treated politely? | YES | <input type="checkbox"/> | NO | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Any comments? | | | | |
| 3. Did we keep to the arrangements we made with you? | YES | <input type="checkbox"/> | NO | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Any comments? | | | | |
| 4. Did you feel you were given enough information about the mediation process? | YES | <input type="checkbox"/> | NO | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Any comments? | | | | |
| 5. Do you feel mediators listened to your side of the story? | YES | <input type="checkbox"/> | NO | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Any comments? | | | | |
| 6. Do you feel we took sides? | YES | <input type="checkbox"/> | NO | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Any comments? | | | | |
| 7. Do you feel that talking with mediators helped you? | YES | <input type="checkbox"/> | NO | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Any comments? | | | | |
| 8. Would you recommend the Mediation Service? | YES | <input type="checkbox"/> | NO | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Do you have anything further you would like to say? | | | | |

Further Information

For further information please contact:

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