

**DRAFT**

**Towards an excellent service for sport and  
recreation  
(TAES)**

**Self Assessment validation process**

**Guidance for those undertaking the validation  
process**

## **1. Introduction**

This booklet provides guidance to those seeking and carrying out the TAES validation process to ensure consistency in the application of the process.

Validation can only be carried out by individuals who have been accredited by the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA).

Validation is designed to ensure the self-assessment process has been carried out properly and with an adequate degree of objectivity and transparency.

Validation provides others with a degree of confidence in the assessment and the improvement plan emerging from the process. This in turn provides confidence that improvement will take place.

It is anticipated that TAES will be recognised by the Audit Commission in the CPA process provided it has been independently validated using this process.

## **2. Background**

The project has been developed within the East Midlands in response to concerns about the quality of performance management in the sector and the impact the comprehensive performance assessment was having on the sport and recreation services particularly in poor and weak authorities.

The development phase took nearly two years and involved representatives of Sport England, ODPM, DCMS, Audit Commission, IDeA, ILAM, ISRM and NASD.

### ***Why develop TAES ?***

The desire to improve performance is now central to the governments policy on public services. Local government, is being challenged to raise it's game through Best Value, performance indicators, inspection and, most recently, the Comprehensive Performance Assessments (CPA). Although the emerging policy drift is generating a greater emphasis on local rather than just national priorities the underlying intent to improve services remains.

Some services such as Education and Social services now have a long history of the performance management approach. Clear national priorities, national performance indicators and inter-authority comparisons, underpinned by inspection processes have been used to drive through improvement in these and other service areas. Sport & recreation however is generally under-developed and weaker in terms of performance management. For example although the early results from Best Value leisure inspections show many examples of good practice, they also show plenty of room for improvement. Early experience from the CPA also showed how the cultural block as a whole was being under- valued in terms of its weighting in first tier authorities and how it was incorporated in the district CPA process. Concerns about measurability remain as the third generation CPA is being developed.

If sport & recreation is to continue to be an important player in the delivery of local public services it must address the improvement agenda. Local government currently controls directly or indirectly many of the resources critical to the future of Sport and Recreation, it has the ability to create the partnership arrangements within which the public, private and voluntary sectors can work together for the benefit of the whole community and it has the democratic leadership to make things happen. However, the quality of much of the current service is at best variable and must be improved if the potential of Sport and Recreation is to be harnessed for the benefit of communities and individuals alike.

### ***The purpose of TAES ?***

The Excellence Framework for Sport and Recreation Services has been developed to achieve three objectives:

- To provide a basis for *self-assessment* that will enable Sport and Recreation providers to achieve continuous improvement for the users of our services.
- To provide a vehicle through which the *national priorities* for sport and physical activity could be achieved by all the organisations involved alongside local priorities in each community.
- To provide an input to *inspection* processes should these be developed in the future.

The Excellence Framework is primarily aimed at local government services and is equally applicable to County, District, Unitary and Metropolitan authorities. It is based on the principles of good management which are the same in any organisation whatever its size or structure.

The Excellence Framework is therefore equally applicable to other organisations such as National Governing Bodies of sport, local Sport Partnerships and the national agencies.

The format of the Framework can also be adapted to other Leisure and Cultural functions that have not yet developed their own frameworks or more generically to an integrated Leisure or Cultural Services department. In this case separate evidence schedules would need to be developed for these services.

### **How does it work?**

The Excellence Framework has been developed using existing quality management models, inspection frameworks and accreditation systems supplemented by consultation with practitioners in the field.<sup>1</sup> This has been supplemented by a piloting process with six local authorities carried out by INLOGOV( Birmingham University).

Some of these existing frameworks such as EFQM, IIP, the equality standard and Quest are recognisable building blocks in the process of seeking excellence but are by their very nature partial in their scope. The Excellence

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<sup>1</sup> These have included among others: EFQM, Charter mark, IIP, the new Equality Standard, Quest, the CPA framework, Ofsted and SSI joint review methodology.

Framework has sought to incorporate these in its design so organisations that are already using these tools will be well placed to achieve high ratings under the Framework.

From the analysis of these existing frameworks and the consultation it is clear that there are eight key factors that influence the quality of Sport and Recreation services delivered to our users. Through effective management in all these areas we can improve the services we deliver on a continuous basis. These factors have been developed around eight “themes”.

1. Leadership
2. Policy and Strategy
3. Community Engagement
4. Partnership Working
5. Use of Resource
6. People Management
7. Standards of Service
8. Performance Measurement and Learning

Within each theme criteria have been identified which define the key aspects of a quality service, with “equality” and “service access” being effectively integrated into every theme. Within each criterion are a number of descriptors that further define the criteria against which the service can be measured using the evidence suggested in the schedule.

This then enables you to plot each descriptor, criteria theme and ultimately the position of the organisation at one of four levels:

- Poor
- Fair
- Good
- Excellent

The process enables you to assess the strengths and weaknesses from which an improvement plan can be drawn.

### **3. The Validation Process.**

The validation process involves three stages.

1. Independent review and challenge of the organisations understanding of the process, the proposed scoping, and the recording of evidence. This would be done before the assessment commences and take up to 1 day depending on the size of the organisation.
2. Independent review of the self- assessment including random checking of selected criteria scoring against identified evidence. This would seek to validate the judgements made about the organisation. Again depending on the size of organisation it is anticipated that up to two days would be required for this stage. Return visits would be required if validation could not be confirmed.

3. Independent review of the improvement plan and critical friend role to ensure the plan adequately addresses the agreed weaknesses. It is anticipated that up to a day would be adequate for this stage again depending on the size of the organisation.

It is anticipated that the validation should be carried out by a minimum of two accredited people. An accredited IDeA consultant would do all three stages and produce the final report. A professional senior leisure officer with experience of the service would participate in the second stage validating the judgements. It is anticipated that this professional input is provided free on a mutual support basis through CLOA and the professional institutes.

### ***Stage 1 pre-assessment review.***

The primary purpose of stage one is to ensure the organisation understands the evaluation process and has prepared properly for it. This involves three key elements:-

- Scoping
- Collecting the evidence
- Preparing for the evaluation itself

#### **a. Scoping the evaluation.**

At the start of the process it is critical that the scope of the assessment has been defined properly.

The scope will vary from organisation to organisation: it will depend on the type of authority, scale, structure, and methods of service delivery, direct or indirect. For example, Sport and Recreation services in some authorities may be provided partly through a Leisure Department, partly through an Education Department, through a range of partnerships or voluntary bodies and in some cases private contractors. It may include a range of different sports facilities including leisure centres, parks and playing fields, sports development, activities and other more general recreational activity.

Where Sport and Recreation are part of a wider Leisure, Cultural, or another Department, the boundaries of the service in terms of management and resources may not be clear. Judgements about leadership, for example, could be related to the unit management, departmental management and cabinet lead, the local authority Chief Executive and Leader of the Council, a partnership or the senior management structure of a private company or trust.

Those carrying out the self-assessment must be very clear and consistent about the scope of the service covered by the evaluation. The first question that should have been asked is who makes up the organisation that is primarily responsible for the delivery of sport and recreation services? A map of this organisation should have been drawn identifying, who is in it, who is not in it. The fact that key parts of the delivery mechanism may not come directly under your management control does not matter, but how you influence and work in partnership with them will be critical to the quality of the service provided to your community. In the Framework the term “organisation” applies to whoever has defined as being responsible for delivering the service.

*Scoping diagrams to assist the process are included in the work book and replicated in appendix 1 & 2.* The first of these is for local authorities and partnerships. The bottom axis identifies the range of possible service providers that may be involved in your assessment. This dimension is critical in terms of how the service itself is evaluated in terms of community engagement, partnership working, service standards and aspects of performance management. The vertical axis defines the management aspects of the organisation and is critical in terms of how you evaluate leadership, policy and strategy, use of resources, people management and performance management.

The second diagram will assist with the scoping of other organisations such as national and regional bodies. Here the services are very different, tend not to be delivered directly to the public but are equally important to the overall delivery of sport. The bottom axis again defines the possible range of services provided. You may provide others. The vertical axis again defines the organisation itself. You may choose to evaluate just your corporate centre, or your whole organisation. Where there is a regional structure or a devolved structure only by doing the whole organisation together will you be able to evaluate the degree to which it is working as one and in symmetry.

The second key question is *who are the community to which the organisation is providing the service?* In terms of local authorities and partnerships it may be a single local authority area (County or District) but in some cases particularly with partnerships it may be a community that goes across a number of local authority areas. For other national or regional organisations community may mean something completely different. For example for membership organisations this could be your members themselves.

***Before the evaluation is started, there must be a clearly articulated understanding of the scope to ensure all those involved in making the judgement are doing so on the same basis.***

***b) Collecting the evidence.***

The framework is set out in the master document. For each of the eight themes there is a short description of what is meant by the theme in order to reduce confusion and misunderstanding.

There is then a short description of the evidence that is likely to be used to make an assessment of how well the service is performing in that category. This evidence can be collated before the assessment is carried out. Other evidence can be used provided it is appropriate and substantiates the judgement being made. Some evidence will be applicable to more than one theme.

**Before commencing the evaluation there must be a clear understanding that evidence will be required to substantiate the judgements and that this has either been collected or will be collected ahead of the process.**

Some of the judgements require third party confirmation. For example judgements about leadership quality will require a view from staff across the organisation as well as the most senior managers. This may be obtained from staff surveys or focus groups. Some of the judgements on partnership working will require a view or assessment from partners or stakeholders again either through surveys or focus groups. Some of this evidence may come from existing sources provided the source is fit for purpose and objective enough to base a judgement on.

**The processes for achieving third party input to the assessment must have been considered and clear plans made to put them into place.**

Some of the judgements may come from other assessment processes such as IIP, Quest, Crystal standard.

**Where these are to be used they must be relevant, up to date assessments, externally validated and fit for purpose.**

### **c) Preparing for the evaluation.**

The evaluation is based on making a judgement about each of 125 descriptors which assess 31 criteria under 8 themes.

Each descriptor has four levels poor – fair – good – excellent .

- Evidence should be collated that enables a judgement to be made. The evidence must be recorded in the work-book.
- The evaluator(s) must decide which description *best* describes the service and mark the decision on the evaluation sheet for each of the elements in that category.
- Where it is clear from the evidence that specific improvements are required in the area being assessed these should be recorded in the work-book.

When the evaluation has been completed the overall evaluation sheet can be completed to produce a comprehensive self-assessment of the service.

The assessment can then be used to:

- Identify areas of strength and of weakness;
- Identify, and explain, different people's interpretations of the service's position in each element and in the eight themes;
- Provide a basis for discussions with managers, partners, and other stakeholders about the way forward for the service;
- Set a benchmark to be used for subsequent discussions about how or where the service has improved;
- Set a benchmark that can be used for in-depth comparisons with other service providers;
- Provide evidence of the service's commitment to service improvement and its ability to improve;

It is important that there is a clear process for carrying out the evaluation. Ideally it should be carried out by a cross section of people from various levels in the organisation. Where services are externalised a representative of the contractor or the trust should play an active part in the process. If the organisation being evaluated is a partnership all the stakeholders should play a role in the evaluation. It may be that different groups of people are invited to carry out an assessment and then these are brought together to create an composite view. Alternatively different groups of people could be invited to assess each theme and then bring them together. It may also be possible to involve elected members in the evaluation either as part of the evaluation team or to get an alternative perspective. Above all it is important to avoid the most senior management team sitting in a closed room assessing themselves.

Remember that the *least* useful information is that provided by adding up the results for the different themes. All that these results tell you is whether or not you have to 'drill down' to get a better picture of the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation. Encourage the evaluation team to discuss the different perspectives and consider why people may view the organisations performance differently. It is critical to end up with a well-rounded and objective assessment of the organisation.

**Overall the method of evaluation must be fully understood and a process been put into place to ensure the judgement is as objective as possible.**

It is anticipated that this first stage will take up to one day depending on the size of organisation and the amount of preparation work carried out ahead of the validation meeting.

### ***Stage 2 Post evaluation validation***

The primary purpose of the second stage validation is to ensure the self-assessment has been properly carried out and that an objective and realistic judgement about the organisation has been made.

This involves 2 key elements:-

- Checking the evidence
- Reality checks

#### **a) Evidenced based judgements**

It will not be possible to rigorously check every judgement against the evidence provided in the time allocated for this stage. Depending on the size of organisation a day or two days is recommended.

As a result a cross section of checks should be made across the themes however some criteria are considered critical and should always be checked against the evidence. These are:-

*2.1 The organisation has a clear strategy for the development of sport and recreation and delivering outcomes from it.*

*3.2 The organisation communicates to, consults with and involves communities in providing sport and recreation services.*

*4.1 The organisation can demonstrate a clear understanding and awareness of partnership working.*

*5.1 Financial resources are allocated in accordance with the strategic priorities of the organisation.*

*6.1 The organisation is committed to recruiting, developing and empowering its people to improve its performance.*

*7.1 The organisation is committed to developing comprehensive and co-ordinated service standards reflecting customer needs.*

*8.1 The organisation has developed a performance management culture.*

*8.2 The organisation monitors and takes action on performance information.*

*8.4 The organisation learns from its performance management and utilises it in its future planning.*

**The judgements made in these, and any other criteria that can be checked must be substantiated from the evidence provided.**

#### **b) Reality checks**

It will not be possible to carry out extensive reality checks by visiting facilities and taking separate evidence. It is suggested that if possible three focus group meetings should be held:-

- A staff focus group to cross reference the judgements made on Leadership, People management and Equal Opportunities.
- A stakeholder focus group to cross - reference the judgements made on community engagement, partnership working and standards of service.
- A senior management and elected member focus group to cross-reference the judgements made on policy and strategy, use of resources and performance measurement and learning. This could also be the feedback meeting giving your initial validation results.

**At the end of this process the judgements made about the organisation must be a proper reflection of its current position and the improvement priorities emerging from the self- assessment are legitimate and justified.**

It is anticipated that this stage will take up to two days involving both the consultant and the peer depending on the size of organisation.

### ***Stage 3 Improvement planning***

The final stage of the validation process is to ensure that the improvement plan that has emerged from the self-assessment is appropriate and realistic. In effect it is capable of leading to improvement.

This involves scrutinising the improvement plan with the senior management team and elected members in terms of:-

- The inclusion of all the areas requiring improvement along with a sense of priority in terms of what will have the biggest impact.
- The level of commitment and accountability for the actions required.
- The resource availability to enable the actions to be implemented in the timescales proposed
- The project management and monitoring arrangements in place to ensure the actions occur.

**These discussions along with an analysis of the improvement plan will provide confirmation that the plan is appropriate and realistic.**

It is anticipated that this stage will take up to one day depending on the size of the organisation.

### **Final validation process**

Once all the stages have been completed, the final validation report can be issued. This will include the final record sheets including observations and judgements made at each stage. Appendix 3.

If the validators are not prepared to sign off any of the stages, the reasons for this must be clearly set out along with recommendations for remedial action required to complete that stage in the process. If necessary a further visit may be required at validators discretion and at an extra cost. However, the purpose of the exercise is to help and support the organisation to improve and not make the process unnecessarily onerous or expensive whilst retaining the integrity of the process.

## **4. Administering the process of Validation**

The validation process will be administered by IDeA. The validation itself will be carried out by two accredited individuals, one (consultant) provided through IDeA and one (peer) provided through the Chief Leisure Officers Association or other appropriate professional bodies. The scale and costs of validation will vary on the size of organisation.

The peer validators should be senior managers from other Sport & Recreation Services within the Region. It is very important that they have the right skills to carry out the review. A list of the competencies required is given as Appendix 4.

Regions may decide to set up a 'pool' of peer validators, each of whom carries out more than one validation over the next few years so that they develop an expertise. Alternatively, it may be decided to spread the workload more evenly so that each peer validator is only used once. The 'pool' option seems to be a more effective idea, although it could place a strain on those people in it and their employers.

One IDeA consultant will be required for each validation. IDeA have asked that they be notified at least 2 months in advance of the validation in order to book both a consultant and a peer.

Sport England and IDeA will provide training for both the consultants and the peers and IDeA will accredit them before making them available for validation exercises.

### **Receiving the Final reports**

Once the validation is finished, the IDeA consultant will send a copy of the final validation report to the organisation.

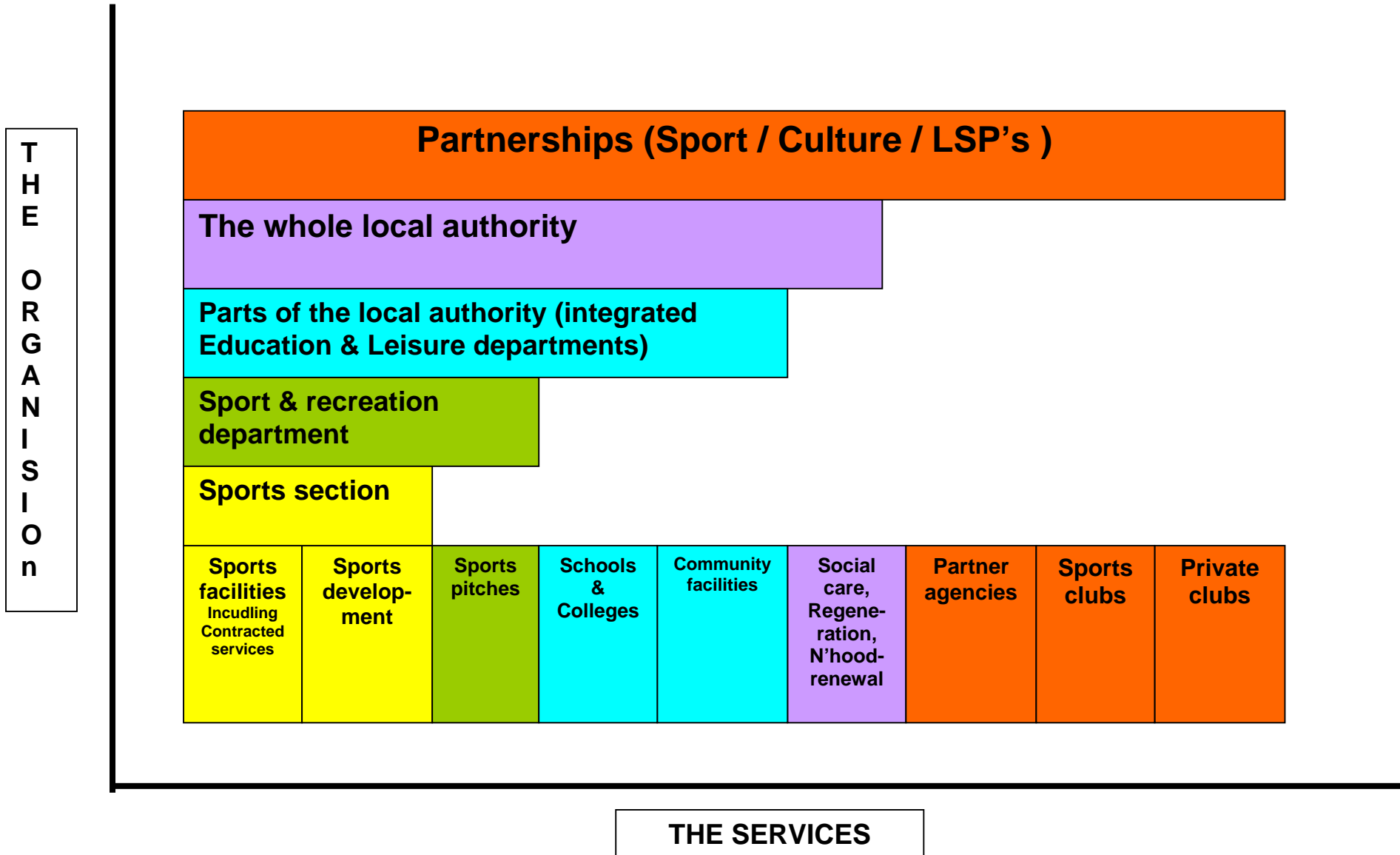
### **Problems with the validation report**

In the event that there is a disagreement between the validation team and the organisation seeking validation, IDeA will encourage the parties to resolve this by informal discussion. If it is impossible to resolve this way, the matter will be referred to IDeA who will organise an informal arbitration through a third party. If this does not work, then the disagreement can be sent to a formal appeal panel that will be chaired by Sport England.

### **Costs of validation**

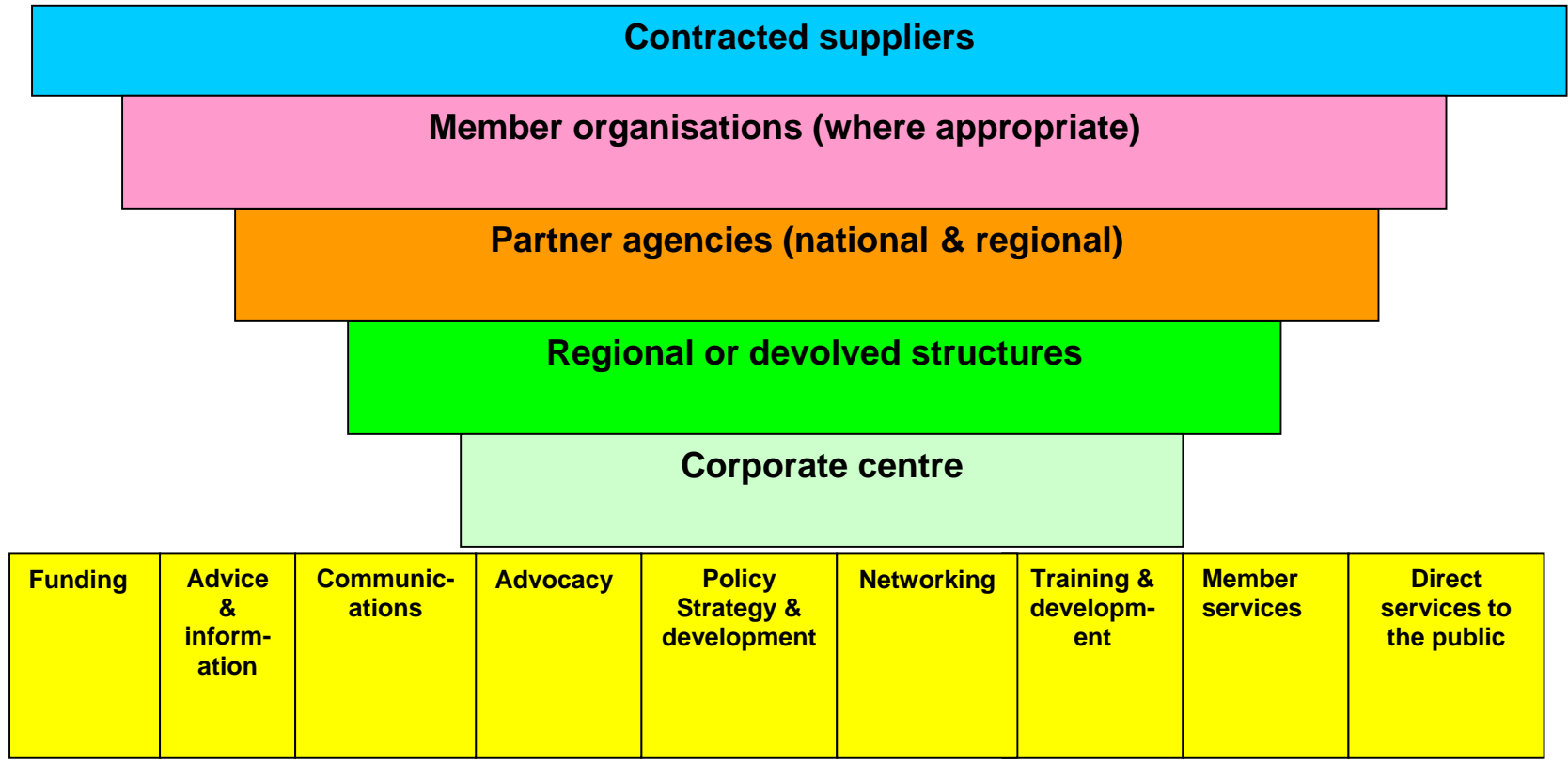
Organisations seeking validation of their self-assessment are required to meet the costs themselves. These will range between £1900 and £3225 (plus expenses) depending on the size of the organisation. A breakdown of these costs are included in Appendix 5.

# Appendix 1 Scoping the service (local authorities & partnerships).



## Appendix 2 Scoping the service (Other organisations).

THE ORGANISATION



THE SERVICES



### **Appendix 3 Record sheets**

#### **Stage 1 Pre Evaluation validation – Record sheet**

<b>Validation criteria</b>	<b>Commentary</b>
<b>Is there a clearly articulated understanding of the scope and are all those involved in making the judgement likely to do so on the same basis?</b>	
<b>Is there is a clear understanding that evidence will be required to substantiate the judgements and this has either been collected or will be collected ahead of the process?</b>	
<b>Is there a process for achieving third party input into the assessment from staff and partners?</b>	
<b>If other accreditation systems are to be used in the assessment, are they up to date, externally validated and fit for purpose?</b>	
<b>Is the methodology of evaluation fully understood and is there a process in place to ensure the judgement will be as objective as possible?</b>	



## Stage 2 Post evaluation validation- record sheet.

Validation criteria	Commentary
<b>Are the judgements made in the following criteria substantiated from the evidence available?</b>	
<i>2.1 The organisation has a clear strategy for the development of sport and recreation and delivering outcomes from it.</i>	
<i>3.2 The organisation communicates to, consults with and involves communities in providing sport and recreation services.</i>	
<i>4.1 The organisation can demonstrate a clear understanding and awareness of partnership working.</i>	
<i>5.1 Financial resources are allocated in accordance with the strategic priorities of the organisation.</i>	
<i>6.1 The organisation is committed to recruiting, developing and empowering its people to improve its performance.</i>	
<i>7.1 The organisation is committed to developing comprehensive and co-ordinated service standards reflecting customer needs.</i>	
<i>8.1 The organisation has developed a performance management culture.</i>	
<i>8.2 The organisation monitors and takes action on performance information.</i>	
<i>8.4 The organisation learns from its performance management and utilises it in its future planning.</i>	
<b>Others</b>	

<p><b>Are judgements made about the organisation a fair reflection of its current position?</b></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A staff focus group cross referenced the judgements made on Leadership, People management and Equal Opportunities.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A stakeholder focus group cross - referenced the judgements made on community engagement, partnership working and standards of service.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A senior management and elected member focus group cross- referenced the judgements made on policy and strategy, use of resources and performance measurement and learning.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Do the improvement priorities emerging from the self-assessment logically flow from the self assessment and evidence provided?</b></p>	

### **Stage 3 Improvement plan- record sheet**

<b>Validation criteria</b>	<b>Commentary</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Are all the areas requiring improvement included in the plan, along with a sense of priority in terms of what will have the biggest impact?</li></ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is there a good level of commitment and accountability for the actions required?</li></ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Are the resource available to enable the actions to be implemented in the timescales proposed?</li></ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Are there project management and monitoring arrangements in place to ensure the actions occur?</li></ul>	
<b>Is the improvement plan therefore appropriate and realistic?</b>	

## APPENDIX 4 – COMPETENCY REQUIREMENTS FOR PEER VALIDATORS

**The role of a ‘peer’ is defined by the IDeA as “to help build capacity, confidence and sustainability in local government by sharing knowledge and experience. This means championing change both through one’s own actions and by recognising and celebrating excellence in others.”**

**This will involve the following activities:**

- Gathering information, analysing situations and identifying needs
- Recognising and incorporating different stakeholders’ perspectives
- Negotiating communicating and explaining potential solutions
- Assisting in the development of plans and ways of achieving change
- Identifying and challenging inappropriate behaviour, assumptions and systems
- Identifying excellence in existing practice
- Providing an external perspective and encouraging individuals to look outside their own authority for ideas and best practice
- Sharing examples of best practice from own experience
- Acting as a critical friend, by providing support and acting as a ‘sounding board’ for ideas and encouraging networking between authorities
- Working as apart of a team and writing reports based on objective evidence

The following competencies are necessary for this:

### **1. Developing Others**

Capacity to share learning and develop others by providing a supportive and non-judgemental environment, and by demonstrating a personal commitment to continual improvement and learning.

### **2. Working with Others**

Ability to work alongside others to achieve a common purpose through valuing the contributions of others and recognising and including diverse viewpoints.

### **3. Providing Challenge**

Capacity to positively and constructively challenge individuals and groups in an effort to help them to improve. Able to perform the role of a change agent sensitively and inclusively.

### **4. Planning and Communicating**

Able to analyse requirements and co-ordinate efforts with others through effective communication and planning, and by providing evidence to support ideas.

### **5. Political and Organisational Sensitivity**

An ability to understand and overcome political and organisational differences in an effort to work collaboratively with different stakeholders.

It is likely that, in order to have developed these competencies, peer validators will be middle or senior managers who have previous experience of auditing or assessing.

## Appendix 5 Validation structure & costs

Validation Phase	Small Organisations		Large organisations	
	Time	Cost	Time	Cost
<b><u>Pre- evaluation review</u></b> <i>Scoping, understanding &amp; preparation</i>				
Consultant	0.5 Days	£250+expenses	<b>1 Day</b>	£500+expenses
<b><u>Post-evaluation review</u></b> <i>Evidence check &amp; reality checks</i>				
<b>Consultant</b>	1 Day Preparation 1 Day on site	£500+expenses £500+expenses	1 Day Preparation 2 Days on site	£500+expenses £1000+expenses
Peer Chief Leisure officer	1 Day Preparation 1 Day on site	None Expenses only	1 Day Preparation 2 Days on site	None Expenses only
<b><u>Improvement plan review</u></b> <i>Quality &amp; resourcing</i>				
Consultant	0.5 Days	£250+expenses	1 Day	£500+expenses
<b><u>Final report</u></b>				
Consultant	0.5 Days	£250+expenses	1 Day	£500+expenses
<b><u>Admin Cost - IDeA</u></b>		£150		£225
<b><u>Total</u></b>	<b>5.5 person days</b>	£1900+expenses	<b>9 person days</b>	£3225+expenses