

**TURNING THE CURVE – A TOOL TO HELP YOU ANALYSE
PERFORMANCE AND IMPROVE OUTCOMES**

**Part of the framework for the planning and commissioning of services
for children and young people**

**August 2008
Version 1.0**

Draft

PURPOSE

This document provides

- Some background information about the Turning the Curve tool
- Practical advice about how to use the tool

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Turning the Curve is a tool that has been developed by Portsmouth Children's Trust based on Mark Friedman's work on "outcome-based" or "results-based" accountability.

Turning the Curve is a process and tool that focuses on outcomes rather than outputs. It is used to demonstrate that by analysing and understanding trend data, a strategy can be developed that aims to achieve better outcomes.

Turning the Curve believes it is more realistic to aim to make long term improvements in the right direction rather than set short term targets.

The DCSF recognises *Turning the Curve* as a key tool in planning and commissioning services, which "heralds a shift away from the setting of output targets and reliance on process measures that have been traditionally used to monitor performance and success"¹. It can involve everyone working with children and young people, and has been embraced by many local authorities and Children's Trusts' and the DCSF is encouraging its use.

Turning the Curve recognises and builds on the reality that no single agency is solely responsible for improving outcomes and can be used by individual agencies and partnerships.

The tool enables performance data to be used as a means of recognising how multiple factors impact on performance, and in turn on outcomes. It enables agencies to recognise and improve the contribution they make towards achieving better outcomes.

Turning the Curve aims to get from talk to action as quickly as possible.

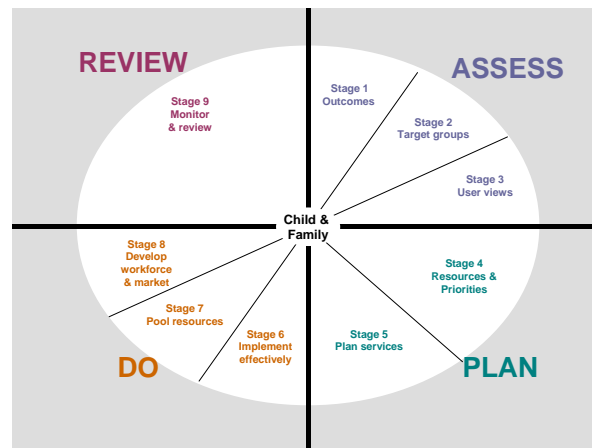
Key ideas behind 'Results Based Accountability':

- Start with ends, work backwards to means. What do we want? How will we recognise it? What will it take to get there?
- Use plain language, not jargon.
- Keep accountability for populations separate from accountability for programmes and agencies.
- Use data (indicators and performance measures) to gauge success or failure against a baseline:
- Use data to drive a disciplined business-like decision-making process to get better.
- Involve a broad set of partners
- Get from talk to action as quickly as possible.

¹ DCSF "A Commitment from The Children's Plan" *Better Outcomes for Children and Young People*

The Commissioner's Handbook

The Commissioner's Handbook sets out the framework that Sunderland Children's Trust has adopted for the planning and commissioning of services for children and young people. The framework consists of four key activities of Assess – Plan – Do – Review.



Turning the Curve is one of the key tools identified as part of the ASSESS activity.

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TURNING THE CURVE – IN PRACTICE

Seven key steps should be followed to effectively aim to improve outcomes by *turning the curve*.

Step 1

Identify the outcome(s) you want to improve - Start with the ends we want (results and indicators) and work backward to determine/ establish the means to achieve these ends

Step 2

Provide a short (one page) report that sets out the history of performance for the outcome – the report should show where we have been, where we are at and where we are going. As you are aiming to improve performance as a contribution towards improving outcomes, the report should consider both quantitative and qualitative information. **[See figures 1 and 2]**

Step 3

Talk about the story behind the baseline – Consider the reasons behind, for example teenage pregnancy. Ask: What's going on here? Why does the baseline look the way it does? What are the causes? What are the forces at work? What would you like to know more about?

Step 4

Identify the partners that contribute towards the outcome - Ask all partners to consider theirs and others views/approaches. It is a good idea to use role play to help partners better understand other points of view

Step 5

Consider what would help us to do better than the baseline – how can we improve the trend? – Look at what research tells us, what works, what doesn't work. **Identify four key ideas to progress that aim to improve the outcome.**

Idea no. 1 – this must be a no / low cost

Idea no. 2 – this must be off the wall

Step 6

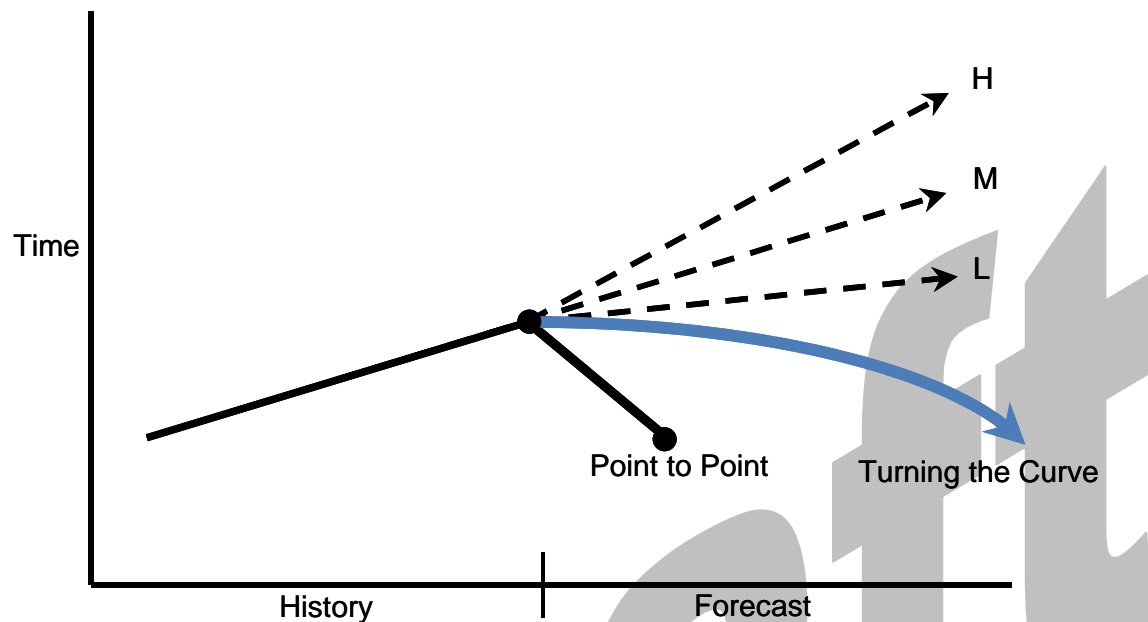
Develop an action plan

Step 7

Review *Turning the Curve*

TURNING THE CURVE – PRACTICAL TOOLS

Figure 1. What *Turning the Curve* aims to achieve



The graph above shows what *turning the curve* aims to achieve.

- The **history** line plots data for your key performance indicator
- The **H (high) M (medium) and L (low)** dotted lines represent three **forecasts** for your key performance indicator. These lines are created by using your historical data to project how your performance will continue if you make no changes to provision and there are no major changes in the your local area. H M L represent High, Medium and Low forecasts.
- The **point to point** line represents a short term target. Quite often, if the target is met, then the outcome area becomes less of a priority. If the target is not met, then work towards the outcome area is deemed to have failed.

Rather than short term improvements *Turning the Curve* aims to bring about long term positive change.

- The **turning the curve** line represents an aspired change in direction of your performance indicator. It is assumed that with this change in direction of performance, there is also an improvement in outcomes. A change in direction is also more likely to be sustainable.

TURNING THE CURVE – PRACTICAL TOOLS

Figure 2. Monitoring, reviewing and recording performance

	Quantity	Quality
Effort	How much did we do?	How well did we do it?
Effect	Is anyone better off?	

The grid above can be used as part of planning and reviewing processes. It can be used to help

- Identify where you are at
- Discuss different options as to what you can do next
- Consider how well you have done, in terms of acting on your plans and the impact they have had

The outputs measured in the upper left box are the least important in relation to achieving better outcomes. The lower right measurements, concerning the quality of results, are the most important, followed by the upper right quadrant, specifying how well the service was provided.

APPENDIX – POWERPOINT PRESENTATION SLIDES THAT CAN BE USED TO DEMONSTRATE TURNING THE CURVE

TURNING THE CURVE

A tool to help you analyse performance and improve outcomes



TURNING THE CURVE – What is it?

- developed by Portsmouth Children's Trust based on Mark Friedman's work on "outcome-based" or "results-based" accountability.
- a process and tool that focuses on outcomes rather than outputs. It is used to demonstrate that by analysing and understanding trend data, a strategy can be developed that aims to achieve better outcomes.
- it is more realistic to aim to make long term improvements in the right direction rather than set short term targets.



TURNING THE CURVE – What is it?

- Recognises performance impacts on outcomes
- Understands no one agency is responsible for improving an outcome but...
- ...allows individual agencies to recognise and improve the contribution they make towards improving outcomes
- A number of people can use or contribute towards the tool: individual services, partnerships, strategic managers, service managers, staff, children, young people and parents, the community
- It is seen as a key tool in the planning and commissioning cycle



TURNING THE CURVE – As part of the planning and commissioning framework



The Commissioner's Handbook sets out the framework that Sunderland Children's Trust has adopted for the planning and commissioning of services for children and young people.

The framework consists of four key activities of Assess – Plan – Do – Review.



Turning the Curve is one of the key tools identified as part of the ASSESS activity.



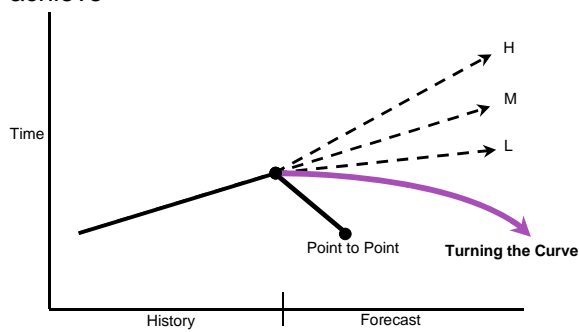
TURNING THE CURVE – Ideas behind it

- Start with ends, work backwards to means. What do we want? How will we recognise it? What will it take to get there?
- Use plain language, not jargon.
- Use data (indicators and performance measures) to gauge success or failure against a baseline:
- Use data to drive a disciplined business-like decision-making process to get better.
- Work out the story behind the data
- Involve a broad set of partners

Get from talk to action as quickly as possible



TURNING THE CURVE – What it aims to achieve



TURNING THE CURVE – 7 key steps

- Step 1 - Identify the outcome(s) you want to improve**
- Step 2 - Provide a short (one page) report that sets out the history of performance for the outcome**
- Step 3 - Talk about the story behind the baseline**
- Step 4 - Identify the partners that contribute towards the outcome**
- Step 5 - Identify four key ideas to progress that aim to improve the outcome. One must be a no / low cost. One must be off the wall**
- Step 6 - Develop an action plan**
- Step 7 - Review *Turning the Curve***



TURNING THE CURVE – Reviewing your actions and their impact on outcomes

	Quantity	Quality
Effort	How much did we do?	How well did we do it?
Effect	Is anyone better off?	



APPENDIX – GLOSSARY

Outcomes based accountability

The tool is based on the concept of outcomes-based accountability, which means it aims to improve quality of life. It has a stronger focus on outcomes than outputs. Outcome-based accountability recognises both population and performance accountability

Outcomes are *end results*. They describe different aspects of *well-being* for whole populations or service users. Eg. a successful support programme for parents of 3-year olds led to fewer temper tantrums by their children after three months, fewer conduct disorders after five years and less involvement in crime after ten years.

Outputs describe service specifications, delivery mechanisms and procedures. Eg. a successful parenting support programme delivered a significant number of training sessions and increased the number of trained facilitators and participating parents.

Performance accountability – aims to improve outcomes for *users of services*, as a contribution towards achieving better outcomes at population level

Population accountability – aims to achieve better outcomes for *particular groups* ie. children and young people in a defined geographical area