

Executive Summary

The benchmarking framework reports on how much councils spend on particular services, service performance and how satisfied people are with the major services provided by councils. The framework supports evidence based comparisons between similar councils so that they can work and learn together to improve their services.

Across the six-year period for which we present data, total current spending by Scottish councils has reduced by 11% in real terms from £17.18 billion to £15.30 billion. During this time, councils have achieved substantial improvements in efficiency, innovation and productivity while service output and outcomes have been maintained and improved. However there remains significant variation between councils as they pursue different policy choices in relation to where they prioritise spend.

While councils have continued to maintain and improve service outputs and outcomes across the majority of service areas in the last 12 months, there is evidence that the ongoing budget constraints are beginning to impact upon some service areas.

Education Services

1. Despite real reductions in the education budget since 2010/11, the number of pre-school and primary places in Scotland has increased by over 30,000, and measures of educational outcome continue to show positive progress, particularly for children from the most deprived areas.
2. In the past 12 months, there have been increases in real costs in pre-school, primary and secondary education, after year-on-year reductions in previous years. In pre-school, real unit costs have increased by 15.9% reflecting the additional costs associated with new entitlements introduced in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. In both primary and secondary education, the small increase in real costs in the past 12 months (1.1% and 1.8% respectively) may reflect access to additional monies such as the Attainment Challenge fund.
3. The trend data on senior phase attainment shows a very strong improving trend. Overall attainment (average tariff score) improved by around 14% but, within that, the most deprived pupils improved the most (25.5%). The pattern in the total tariff score data is replicated in the data on 5+ passes at SCQF levels 5 and 6 (or above). Average improvement rates on these indicators between 2011/12 and 2015/16 was 15.7% and 26.9% respectively. For the most deprived quintile it was almost double that: 34.5% and 50.0%. There is however, still a very substantial “gap” between the most deprived and the average, reflecting a wide range of factors including the different choices different pupils make and the qualifications necessary to pursue them.
4. Satisfaction with schools has fallen for the third year in a row, reducing from 79% to 74% in the last 12 months, and down nine percentage points since 2010/11. The LGBF satisfaction data is drawn from the Scottish Household Survey and represents satisfaction levels for the public at large, rather than only for service users.

Adult Social Care

5. Spending on care for older people has grown in real terms across the period since 2010/11 (+6%) but not at the level necessary to keep up with demographic change (2-3% per annum). The balance of care has shifted in line with policy across the period, with a growth in home care and a relative decline in residential places. As importantly, the number of people receiving home care has decreased over time and the hours of care they receive on average has increased, i.e. in shifting the balance of care, a greater resource has become targeted on a smaller number of people with higher needs. Self-directed support has grown steadily across

the period from 1.6% to 6.7% of total spend. A comparison of the base year and 2015/16, therefore, shows real growth in budgets, and steady progress on priority objectives.

6. This picture is qualified if the more recent years, 2014/15 and 2015/16, are focused upon and the trends above are linked to wider data on the health and care system. Across the past 12 months, spending on home care grew by 3.9% but the cost per hour of care increased by 6.1% and the number of hours provided fell by 2.8%. The number of older people placed in care homes grew by 1.2% having fallen in previous years.

Culture and Leisure Services

7. Across culture and leisure services, costs per visit/attendance have significantly reduced since 2010/11. Substantial increases in visitor numbers for sports (16.8%), libraries (29.8%), and museums (36.6%) have been achieved against a backdrop of a 12% reduction in net expenditure. The growth in visitor numbers has slowed in the past 12 months. Public satisfaction rates for all culture and leisure facilities have fallen in the last 12 months.

Environmental Services

8. Whilst spending on environmental services reduced by 4% from 2010/11 to 2014/15, it has grown in the past 12 months by 3%. This is partly due to a 9% growth in waste disposal expenditure and a 5% growth in roads expenditure since 2014/15. During this time, both road conditions and recycling rates have improved. There have been significant reductions in spend in street cleansing (-25% since the base year) although the rate of reduction has slowed in the past 12 months (-2%). Street cleanliness scores have reduced slightly in the past couple of years although are still above 90%. Public satisfaction rates for refuse collection and street cleaning have fallen since 2014/15, by 2% and 1% respectively.

Corporate Services

9. In relation to overall council corporate and support costs, these continue to account for only 5% of total gross revenue spend for local government across Scotland. There has been a 16.5% real terms decrease in costs of the democratic core per 1,000 population since 2010/11, including a 2.8% reduction in the past 12 months. The cost per dwelling of collecting Council Tax also continues to reduce, falling by 30% over the same period with the rate of reduction accelerating in recent years. Meanwhile, the collection rate continues to show steady improvement from 94.7% in the base year to 95.7% in 2015/16.
10. Sickness absence days have reduced for both teaching staff and non-teaching staff in the past 12 months (2.6% and 1.5% reduction).

Housing Services

11. Councils continue to manage their stock well, with a reduction in rent lost to voids since 2010/11, and consistent and significant improvements in terms of housing standards and energy efficiency standards. However, at the same time, the growth in tenant's arrears from 5.6% to 6.2% reveals evidence of the increasing financial challenges facing both housing residents and councils alike.

Economic Development and Planning

12. While there was an increase in the percentage of unemployed people assisted into work from council funded/operated employability programmes between 2012/13 and 2014/15, this has reduced slightly in the past 12 months (from 14.14% in 2014/15 to 13.91% in 15/16). The Business Gateway start-up rate has also reduced from 19% to 16.9% in the past 12 months.

13. In planning services, between 2010/11 and 2015/16 costs fell from £5,234 per application to £4,832 per application, however they have risen slightly in the past 12 months. In parallel, the time taken to process commercial planning applications reduced by 13.6% between 2012/13 and 2014/15, although again increasing slightly in the past 12 months.