



Local Government Benchmarking Framework

Statement of Voluntary Compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics

June 2019

1 About the Local Government Benchmarking Framework

- 1.1 The Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) is a high-level benchmarking tool designed to support senior management teams and elected members to ask questions about key council services in Scotland. It brings together a wide range of statistics and information about how all Scottish local authorities perform in delivering these services.
- 1.2 The LGBF is collected and published by the Improvement Service (IS) and reflects a commitment by SOLACE (Scotland) and COSLA to develop better measurement and comparable data in order to help councils improve services, target resources to areas of greatest impact and enhance public accountability.
- 1.3 Publication of the LGBF forms part of each local authority's statutory public performance reporting.
- 1.4 The LGBF is governed by a board chaired by SOLACE and including representatives from SOLACE, COSLA, key local government professional associations, the Accounts Commission and the Scottish Government.

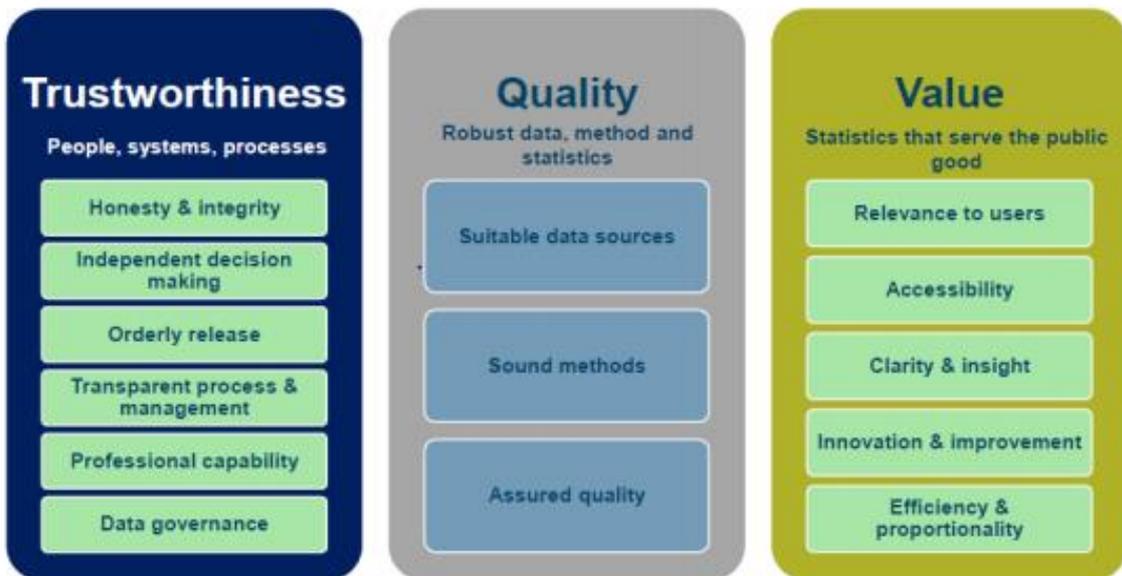
2 About the Improvement Service

- 2.1 The Improvement Service is the national improvement body for local government in Scotland. The purpose of the IS is to help councils and their partners to improve the health, quality of life and opportunities of all people in Scotland through community leadership, strong local governance and the delivery of high quality, efficient local services.
- 2.2 The IS is a partnership between the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives in Scotland (SOLACE), and is governed by a board of directors. The IS is funded through a core grant from the Scottish Government, which forms part of the local government block expenditure grant. We also generate additional funding and resourcing.
- 2.3 The IS has published the LGBF since 2013 and the LGBF team is responsible for collecting, validating, and publishing the LGBF data each year.

3 About the Code of Practice for Statistics

- 3.1 The Code of Practice for Statistics provides producers of official statistics with detailed practices that they must commit to when producing and releasing official statistics. It is designed to give the public confidence that published statistics are high quality, of public value, and produced by organisations worthy of trust.
- 3.2 Voluntary application of the Code is for producers of data, statistics, and analysis that are not official statistics, such as the LGBF, to help them produce analytical outputs that are high quality, useful for supporting decisions, and well respected.
- 3.3 The Code is built upon three pillars: trustworthiness, quality, and value

The three pillars



4 Our Commitment to the Voluntary Statement of Compliance

- 4.1 The data and analysis produced within the LGBF are not official statistics, therefore the IS is not legally required to apply the Code of Practice to these figures. However, central to the LGBF approach is ensuring that our stakeholders within local government and the public have trust in our data. Voluntary adoption of the Code demonstrates our commitment to this and makes clear how our approaches and methods ensure the highest standards for production of data and analysis are met.
- 4.2 We are committed to improving the quality and value of our data, and demonstrating the trustworthiness of our systems and processes. Voluntary adoption of the Code is an important part of this commitment. In addition, we are committed as part of this voluntary compliance to reviewing and improving all of our processes on an ongoing basis.
- 4.3 The sections below outline our approaches to adopting the three pillars of trustworthiness, quality, and value.

5 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness relates to the processes, systems, and people within an organisation and how these ensure that our data are free from vested interests.

- 5.1 LGBF Board representation provides independent decision making and leadership to reflect the needs and priorities of local government and ensures ongoing collective ownership of this local government led approach.
- 5.2 Funding for LGBF is provided by all 32 local authorities and the Improvement Service
- 5.3 The LGBF team are responsible for ensuring transparency in methods and engagement with stakeholders and data users. All contact details for the team are made available through the LGBF website and included with each data publication.

- 5.4 All of the processes for collection, analysing, and publishing the data are made clear and transparent and are included within the published methodology. We are in regular communication with all of the data providers around what data we will collect and how we will analyse this. Where any changes are made to data, including historic data, these are communicated with the data publication.
- 5.5 All of the raw data that we collect and use to calculate our indicators for all years of the LGBF are made freely available on our website. The data are available to use under the Open Government Licence.
- 5.6 The LGBF has a clear release timetable, which is agreed in advance by the LGBF board. The initial data collection is released usually in January each year, with a further update in March following the release of the Local Government Finance Statistics by the Scottish Government.
- 5.7 All data is released to everyone on the same date via our website. The exception to this is that local authorities have access to the data in the period prior to publication in order to verify their data. Published data is communicated to the public via Twitter, a COSLA press release and publication on relevant websites, including councils own performance reporting pages.
- 5.8 The IS has clear policies in place around data governance and privacy, all of which can be found within the IS privacy statement on our website. A link to the statement can be found below.
- 5.9 The LGBF team are trained and experienced in working with the data and analytical tools, and receive support and guidance on analytical and other related matters from professionals across the IS. We also regularly seek guidance from data professionals and subject experts from other organisation including professional bodies.

6 Quality

Quality relates to whether statistics meet their intended usages, are based on appropriate data and methods to ensure accuracy and reliability, and are not materially misleading.

- 6.1 The LGBF brings together a combination of statistics to give a holistic picture of service delivery in local government. This includes local authority performance and finance data, which they have a statutory duty to report on, as well as relevant data produced by bodies such as the Scottish Government, the NHS Information Services Division, National Records of Scotland, and the Scottish Housing Regulator
- 6.2 We utilise established methods and standards where possible. Our methods for improving and ensuring data quality and reliability are developed in discussion with data providers and professional bodies. For example, figures sourced from the Scottish Household Survey (SHS) at local authority level have been rolled into 3 year estimates in order to improve the sample size and reliability. This approach was developed together with the SHS team.
- 6.3 More broadly, we are in ongoing communication with the Scottish Government and professional bodies such as Social Work Scotland and the Scottish Local Authority Economic Development Group (SLAED) around the relevance, appropriateness, and accuracy of the collected indicators in measuring performance within each service area. Together with these organisations our indicators are also continuously reviewed, and decisions made around the suitability for inclusion.
- 6.4 Where the data we have used has limitations, we aim to be clear about what these are and continue to work to address these issues.
- 6.5 In most cases, LGBF indicators are drawn from existing published datasets, which is audited and quality assured. Where we collect administrative and performance data directly from local authorities we provide guidance explaining what each measure captures and councils are required to confirm compliance with this guidance upon submission. We then validate and check these data internally, through comparison against previous years and other local authorities, and local authorities and professional associations are consulted and potential errors investigated. In addition, we also provide support to councils to drill down into their data to better understand and address any anomalies within their own methodology. Financial data are verified and updated using Local Finance Returns each March. We are working to improve all of these processes on an ongoing basis to provide further reassurance around the validity and quality of all of our data.
- 6.6 We also provide metadata for all of our indicators, which is freely available and published together with our data on our website. This metadata outlines all of the methods used, data sources, and limitations with the data.

7 Value

Value relates to whether data are useful, relevant, easy to access, and support understanding of important issues. This pillar also commits producers to improving statistics and analysis.

- 7.1 The LGBF is designed to help local authorities understand where their services vary in relation to the included indicators to inform decision making, drive improvement and strengthen public accountability. There is a growing evidence base published on the LGBF website which demonstrates how councils are using the framework and the improvements being delivered as a result.
- 7.2 New and existing indicators are reviewed by the LGBF board and council chief executives to ensure that they are a relevant source of information about local government performance for all users of the LGBF. SOLACE, Professional associations and data providers are represented on the LGBF Board to ensure the relevance, appropriateness, and accuracy of indicators used within the framework.
- 7.3 The published data are accompanied by an extensive report outlining the purpose of the framework, summarising key messages, and providing a comprehensive breakdown of trends and variation for each indicator.
- 7.4 All data are published freely on the IS website. We provide the raw data in Excel format, as well as an online tool, which allows the data to be easily explored and local authorities compared and tracked over time. The full dataset is free to access and reuse. We also share the data with Audit Scotland for use in their Local Government Overview report and BV Assurance Reports through a direct API
- 7.5 We are committed to the use of innovative new technology to improve both the data collection and analysis process, as well as the presentation and publication of our figures. This includes the use of APIs; R-Shiny; MyLocalCouncil interactive tool; Sharepoint; and a range of interactive Excel tools
- 7.6 We are committed to producing additional breakdowns of our data, for example publishing all of the numerators and denominators used to calculate our indicators where possible.
- 7.7 Details of the LGBF team are made freely available on our website, and they can be contacted with any queries about any of the published data and analysis.
- 7.8 We consider the needs of our data providers and where possible we have attempted to align our processes in order to fit with other data collection and publication processes.
- 7.9 Feedback is collected on an ongoing basis from users, including through an annual survey carried out by the Improvement Service. This is then used to formulate an improvement action plan, which is used to update our processes and better meet the needs of our users.

8 Further Information and Links

- 8.1 All information about the LGBF can be found on our website - <http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/benchmarking/index.html>
- 8.2 General enquiries can be sent to the team via email – benchmarking@improvementservice.org.uk
- 8.3 Details about the Improvement Service, including our governance structure and business plan can be found via the following links:
 - Our website - <http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/>
 - 2019/20 Business Plan - <http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/documents/corporate/is-business-plan-2019.pdf>
 - What we do, and how we are funded and governed - <http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/what-we-do.html>
 - IS privacy statement - <http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/privacy-statement.html>

- 8.4 Details on the Code of Practice for Statistics - <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/code-of-practice/the-code/>
- 8.5 Audit Scotland Local Government in Scotland - <https://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/report/local-government-in-scotland-challenges-and-performance-2019>