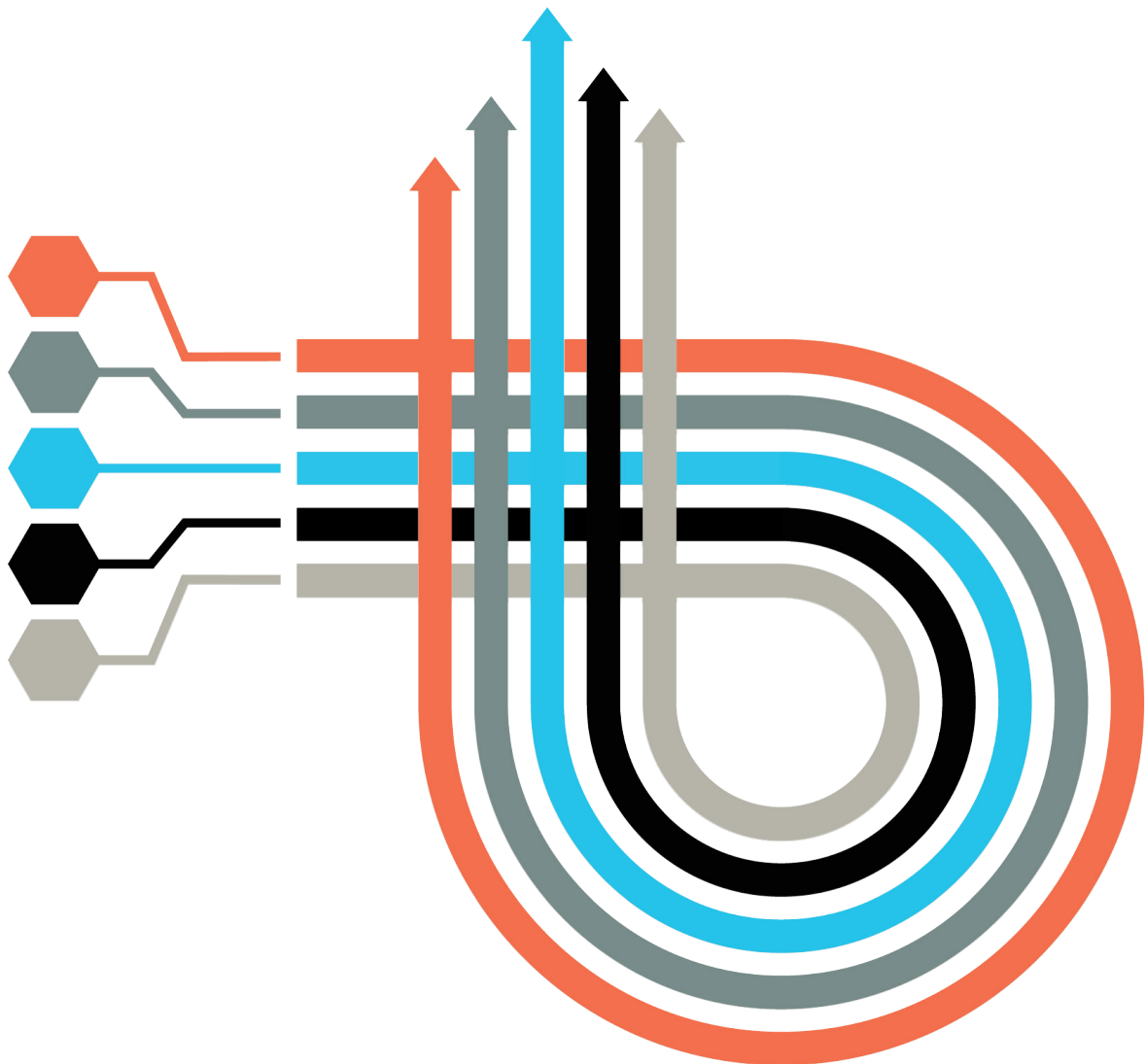


ELECTED MEMBER GUIDANCE

Understanding and using the Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF)





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Introduction to the LGBF

The LGBF is a high-level benchmarking tool designed to support senior management teams and elected members to ask questions about key council services. It reflects a commitment within local government to develop better measurement and comparable data as a catalyst for improving services, targeting resources to areas of greatest impact and enhancing public accountability.

The framework provides high-level ‘can openers’ which are designed to focus questions on why variations in cost and performance are occurring between similar councils. They do not supply the answers. That happens as councils engage with each other to ‘drill down’ and explore why these variations are happening. As an elected member, you have a key role in:

- ▶ asking officers to provide an analysis of the data;
- ▶ scrutinising the data and understanding where there is significant variation between your councils performance and that of others (particularly within Family Groups);
- ▶ ensuring officers are engaging with other councils to explore any variations and providing explanations on this; and
- ▶ ensuring this learning feeds into efforts to drive improvement.

The LGBF helps councils compare their performance against a suite of efficiency, output and outcome indicators that cover the following services:

- ▶ [Children’s Services](#)
- ▶ [Adult Social Care](#)
- ▶ [Culture & Leisure](#)
- ▶ [Environmental Services](#)
- ▶ [Corporate Services](#)
- ▶ [Housing](#)
- ▶ [Economic Development and Planning](#)
- ▶ [Financial Sustainability](#)
- ▶ [Tackling Climate Change](#)

The LGBF [voluntarily applies](#) the high standards for statistical rigour set out in the three pillars of the UK Statistics Authority Code of Practice – trustworthiness, quality, and value. While this means the data is reliable, how you use the LGBF will determine whether it helps drive improvement.

So how does it work?

Accessing the data

Your council officers will provide you with reports containing the LGBF data. You should make sure that those reports are in line with the good practice principles contained in this guidance and challenge appropriately where it does not.

You can access the data on the LGBF website and explore it yourself if you wish. The 'Explore the Data' section of the LGBF website contains a helpful explainer video of how to navigate the data dashboard.

<https://www.improvementservice.org.uk/benchmarking/explore-the-data>

Family groups

Councils are not all the same, they differ greatly in terms of size, population, geography and demographics. Whilst wherever possible, the indicators have been made as equitable as possible (i.e. cost per unit, rather than total cost), the differences between councils nonetheless means that outright comparisons are not always appropriate. To help you compare your council to a more relevant group of peers, we have created Family Groups. These are split into 4 groups of 8. There are two different sets of family group; one is based on the rural/urban balance of each council, and the other is based on deprivation/affluence. The family groups based on rurality are used to compare all measures relating to environment, culture & leisure, economic development, corporate and property. The groups that are based on deprivation/affluence are used to compare the measures relating to children, social work and housing.

How to interpret the data

Some services have multiple indicators. For instance, some have performance indicators, and also cost of providing the service. Where multiple indicators apply, these should all be taken into account to provide a fuller picture of how the council is performing. If performance is less than expected, cost should also be checked as it may be that the council's main priority is reducing the cost of a particular service, rather than improving the performance. It may be the case that to achieve high performance, the costs involved would be significant, and the council does not consider that the high cost would be justifiable.

The full list of indicators for each service can be found here

<https://www.improvementservice.org.uk/benchmarking/home/indicator-list>

Trends over time

The framework allows you to see trends over time. Performance is not static and as well as considering your council's current position relative to other relevant councils, it is useful to consider the direction of travel. For instance, poor performance could be a legacy issue and actually you may find that your council has taken great strides in improving performance over the time-period the LGBF covers. By the same token you may find that other councils that appear to be out-performing your council currently, have had static or reduced performance over the time period, suggesting that, if the trends continue, your council would overtake those other councils' performance in the future.

Low performance on its own isn't always necessarily a 'bad' thing; if a council does not prioritise that particular service or indicator, then the level of performance may be as expected.

Strategy and policy documents should be consulted to check whether or not the council considers the area of low performance a high priority area. If not then it may be that, in fact, the 'low' performance is meeting expectations. However, if the council does consider this area to be a strategic priority, but performance has not improved, this would be an area for concern.



Using the LGBF for Improvement: Good Practice Principles

The following good practice principles are found in guidance to councils on how to use the LGBF. As an elected member, you should familiarise yourself with these and hold officers and other elected members to account for appropriate use of LGBF data, which will promote a culture of driving improvement.

1. Flexibility

Councils should draw flexibly on the LGBF suite of measures to reflect what matters to them, e.g., local strategic priorities and identified improvement areas. It is recognised that not all measures are of equal importance to each authority, and councils should self-determine which measures add value to their own performance approach.

2. Holistic picture of improvement

Councils should use the long-term and holistic nature of the LGBF to explore progress against wider outcomes and to understand interconnections across policy areas. The value of the rich comparative LGBF dataset is that it provides an overview of Local Government over time, providing cost, productivity, performance and outcome measures across all key service areas. This allows for a wealth of analysis, insight and intelligence to be generated to support decision making, improvement and practice sharing.

3. Embedding in local planning and improvement processes

The LGBF is not an end in itself. What matters is how it is embedded and used within local strategic, service & budget planning, improvement, change management, scrutiny and reporting activities. Councils should identify those measures of importance and incorporate them within planning, improvement and reporting processes. This will ensure data provided in the LGBF contributes to a more locally relevant understanding of performance and will provide more focussed intelligence to support councils to target improvement activity.

4. Supplementing with other information

Councils should use the LGBF alongside other appropriate local data to provide a richer and more balanced picture against the council's strategic priorities. The LGBF is just one tool in councils' local intelligence 'toolbox', adding value through the comparative element it provides. Its strength comes as it is used alongside other data.

5. Using LGBF data as ‘Can-openers’

Councils should use the data diagnostically to ask questions to develop a better understanding of their own service and others, in order to target and drive improvement activity. The indicators in the LGBF are very high-level indicators and are designed to focus questions on why variations in cost and performance are occurring between similar councils. They do not supply the answers. That happens as councils engage with each other to ‘drill down’ and explore why these variations are happening.

Elected members have a key role in ensuring LGBF data is used as ‘Can-openers’ for learning and ultimately driving improvement.

6. Learning from others

Councils should use the LGBF as a platform for sharing practice and learning. Councils are arranged in ‘family groups’ enabling comparisons to be made between councils that are similar in terms of the type of population that they serve (e.g. relative deprivation and affluence) and the type of area in which they serve them (e.g. urban, semi-rural, rural). The point of comparing like with like is that this is more likely to lead to useful learning and improvement.

7. Supporting relationships with citizens & communities

Councils should use the LGBF data creatively to support and strengthen their relationship with citizens and communities. This includes sharing the data in an accessible and engaging way, with supporting narrative and context to help citizens make sense of the information. Most importantly, is that the data is used to develop the conversation and engagement with local communities about priorities and progress.

8. Corporate & Political Leadership

To support a culture of performance improvement, use of the LGBF should seek to empower openness, willingness to interrogate data and ask challenging questions, and actively pursue learning opportunities. Leadership (corporate and political) is key as many drivers of variation are not at service level, but may be political, structural and strategic. It is important that Elected Members and Senior Managers are able to demonstrate ownership of and commitment to this improvement approach, and to promote the potential value the LGBF can offer locally.



Key questions to ask officers

The following questions are starting points for scrutinising officers as part of your scrutiny role:

Understanding performance and variations

- ▶ How does our council's performance compare to similar councils in our 'family group'?
- ▶ Are there any significant variations in cost or performance between us and other councils?
- ▶ Have we identified the reasons behind any differences in our performance?
- ▶ Are we improving over time in key service areas, or are there areas where performance has declined?

Continuous improvement and value for money

- ▶ How do our service costs compare with other councils delivering similar services?
- ▶ Are we achieving the expected levels of service quality for the money we are spending?
- ▶ Are there councils achieving better outcomes with similar or lower spending? What can we learn from them?
- ▶ Have we conducted any service reviews based on LGBF data insights?
- ▶ What internal actions have been taken in response to benchmarking results?

Learning from other councils

- ▶ What lessons have we learned from other councils?
- ▶ Can you provide examples of good/innovative practice from other councils that we could learn from?

Ensuring data-informed decision-making

- ▶ How is LGBF data being used to inform our strategic and financial planning?
- ▶ Have we used LGBF data to set targets or improve service delivery?
- ▶ Are there any areas where our performance does not match our stated priorities?
- ▶ Are we using other local data sources alongside LGBF to get a fuller picture of performance?
- ▶ What additional data do we need to make more informed decisions?
- ▶ How do we ensure that LGBF data is not being used in isolation but as part of a broader evidence base?

Monitoring trends over time

- ▶ What do historical trends show about our council's performance? Are we improving, declining, or staying the same?
- ▶ Have we set realistic improvement targets based on previous trends?
- ▶ Are there early warning signs in any service area that we should address proactively?
- ▶ Are there services where we are excelling/improving over time? What factors are driving this?

Public engagement and transparency

- ▶ How are we sharing benchmarking data with our communities in an accessible and engaging way?
- ▶ Are we using this data to explain service changes or improvements to residents?
- ▶ What feedback have we received from the public about our performance, and how does it align with the LGBF findings?

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