

Using the LGBF for Improvement: Good Practice Principles

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 - it is how it is embedded and used within local strategic, service & budget planning, improvement, change management, scrutiny and reporting activities that matters. 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.

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. The following themes could be used to target this activity:

- Is our current approach and investment delivering the levels of performance we are seeking?
- Are there other councils (within FG/meaningful comparators) achieving levels of performance/improvement/savings we would like to see in key areas?
- Are there other councils (within FG/meaningful comparators) spending similar levels, achieving more? Or spending less, achieving similar levels?
- What is driving their levels of performance/spend? What is different in their set up? e.g. service model/design; systems; policies/practices; partnerships; leadership; workforce profile; staff skill sets; strategic agenda; local political or demographic context; Is there anything we can learn from them?

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.