

Report

Report to:	Performance and Review Scrutiny Forum
Date of Meeting:	19 March 2024
Report by:	Chief Executive

Subject:	Local Government Benchmarking Framework 2022/2023 Results and Action Plan
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1. Purpose of report

1.1. The purpose of this report is to:-

- provide the Forum with the Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) results for 2022/2023
- provide the Forum with explanatory narrative for the suite of indicators, including the proposed actions, where appropriate, being taken to address those LGBF indicators where the results are declining and/or are below the Scottish average
- provide a family group analysis of those LGBF indicators where South Lanarkshire Council's result is below the Scottish average

2. Recommendations

2.1. The Forum is asked to approve the following recommendations:-

- (1) that the importance of viewing LGBF measures in the local context, as detailed in the limitations and cautions section below (paragraphs 4.1 to 4.4) be noted;
- (2) that the results, narrative, actions and family group analysis included, following the scrutiny of the 2022/2023 results, be noted; and
- (3) that the arrangements for the publication of South Lanarkshire Council's results, per the statutory requirements, be noted.

3. Background

3.1. The core purpose of the Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) is to make comparisons on spend/cost, performance and customer satisfaction results over several years and also between similar councils. It comprises a suite of performance indicators, collated under the following service headings:-

- Children's Services
- Corporate Services (ie support services)
- Adult Social Care
- Culture and Leisure Services
- Environmental Services
- Housing Services
- Corporate Assets
- Economic Development
- Climate Change
- Financial Sustainability

- 3.2. These headings represent approximately 70% of local authority spend.
- 3.3. Publication of the LGBF results is a statutory requirement set out by the Accounts Commission in the Direction to local authorities as required by the Local Government Act 1992. It is seen as a key part of councils' commitment to Best Value, public performance reporting (PPR) and continuous improvement.
- 3.4. This report presents the 2022/2023 LGBF results (on a Service by Service basis) and sets out commentary and improvement actions against those indicators. Of particular interest in terms of continuous improvement are those indicators which are declining and/or falling below the Scottish average. The steps and actions identified in the report will not necessarily show immediate improvements - many are long term plans.

4. Interpreting the LGBF Results: Limitations and Cautions

- 4.1. Although the LGBF results are available for all councils in Scotland – and therefore can be used to construct council league tables – the Local Government Improvement Service cautions against this approach, emphasising that the purpose of the data is to act as a 'can-opener' for discussions about performance and improvement in the context of specific services, taking into account geography, demographics and local council priorities.
- 4.2. Within this report, South Lanarkshire's performance trend for the past 3 years is provided, together with the most recent year's performance relative to the Scottish average. As with the LGBF as a whole, these summary figures are intended to frame a closer examination of the underlying data and context for specific indicators. For this reason, it is necessary to pay close attention to the narrative against each indicator (provided in Appendix 1) when forming a judgement about what the performance means in a South Lanarkshire context.
- 4.3. All statistics require, for correct interpretation, a knowledge of potential limitations. In particular, the following specific points should be borne in mind when reviewing the LGBF results:-
- Local policy decisions can impact on the LGBF results and interpretation of the data. This is particularly true for cost indicators in the LGBF suite, where lower costs are generally equated with good performance. In these instances, where the Council has opted to invest resources (for example in roads maintenance or in the school estate), costs will appear higher than the Scottish average or for comparable councils, and performance may be assessed as 'worse'.
 - A number of satisfaction measures within the LGBF are derived from the Scottish Household Survey (SHS). There are important limitations to this data – which the Council has highlighted for several years now. First, the number sampled is very small relative to the population – in 2022, around 450 households participated in the survey, around 0.3% of the total. Second, survey respondents are asked how satisfied they are with services even if they have not used the service in question. Third, for these indicators, the Council conducts its own surveys of service users so that it can closely monitor and respond to user experiences. These surveys – of people who have used the services – invariably rate the services more highly than the SHS (the results of the SHS telephone survey are not directly comparable to SHS results for previous years. This is due to a reduced sample size and a change in methodology due to the Covid-19 pandemic).

- The figures within the LGBF are the result of a wide range of service provision models and data collection processes carried out in each of Scotland's 32 councils. While the LGBF endeavours to achieve high standards of completeness and consistency, there are inevitably differences between councils and between indicators in terms of what is counted and how it translates into LGBF performance.

- 4.4. These points are not intended to undermine the LGBF results. Rather they serve to emphasise the importance of looking individually at each service and each indicator to understand the local drivers and determinants of performance.
- 4.5. The Local Government Improvement Service (LGIS) hosted their annual learning event on 7 December 2023. The LGIS analyse the LGBF results and identify the key national expenditure and performance trends. The lead benchmarking performance officers from local authorities across Scotland are invited to discuss these findings, and to offer some local insights that may have affected the results. The Local Government Improvement Service uses the information and intelligence gathered to populate their National Overview Report which is published at the same time as the actual results. Key general points emerging from this analysis include:-
 - The pre-Covid improvements continue to slow down. This is unlikely to change as the long-term impact from increasing financial pressures is beginning to show in the results
 - Budget ring-fencing in service areas like social care, education and looked after children creates growing pressure on other services for example culture and leisure, roads, environmental services etc
 - caution must be exercised in interpreting the national trends from the data as they often disguise the variations and complexities in the local picture
 - as a general observation, staff shortages and recruitment challenges continue to affect service provision and associated costs

South Lanarkshire Council specific analysis and narrative is included in the 'comments/progress' column in Appendix 1.

5. Results and Key Messages

- 5.1. The report attached as Appendix 1 summarises the recent results for South Lanarkshire Council, indicating whether performance in 2022/2023 has improved (↑) or declined (↓) compared with 2021/2022 results, and if performance is better (✓) or worse (X) than the Scottish average in 2022/2023. It also includes explanatory narrative for the movements in performance between 2021/2022 and 2022/2023.
- 5.2. The table below summarises South Lanarkshire Council's performance, which should be considered in the context of the Covid 19 legacy.

Table 1 – Summary of performance of LGBF Results (as at February 2024)

KEY:		Number (%) of indicators			
		2020-21	2021-22	2021-22 updated	2022-23
South Lanarkshire performance					
↑	improving performance in SLC	36 (38%)	35 (35%)	39 (39%)	45 (45%)
↓	declining performance in SLC	36 (38%)	39 (40%)	53 (54%)	26 (25%)
↔	No change in performance in SLC	2 (2%)	3 (3%)	3 (3%)	3 (3%)
---	Results/trends not available	21 (22%)	22 (22%)	4 (4%)	28 (27%)
Comparison with Scottish average					
✓	SLC results better than Scottish average	37 (39%)	41 (42%)	50 (51%)	38 (38%)
X	SLC results worse than Scottish average	37 (39%)	34 (34%)	43 (43%)	34 (33%)
↔	SLC results same as Scottish average	0 (0%)	2 (2%)	2 (2%)	2 (2%)
--	Results not available	21 (22%)	22 (22%)	4 (4%)	28 (27%)

2020-21 Results at May 2022 refresh

2021-22 Results at 31 January 2023 (currently on website)

2021-22 updated Results at 29 November 2023

2022-23 Results at February 2024

Note: three new indicators under the Climate change service heading were recommended for inclusion in the LGBF suite in 2022/2023:-

- Emissions from Transport per Capita
 - Emissions from Electricity per Capita
 - Emissions from Natural Gas per Capita
- (data for which is not yet available)

- 5.3. Across the 102 indicators in the 2022/2023 suite, South Lanarkshire Council's performance improved against 45 (45%) indicators, remained the same against 3 (3%) indicators, and declined for 26 (25%) indicators. There are 28 (27%) indicators for which the results or trend information is not yet available for 2022/2023, including home care, cost of looked after children, educational attainment and attendance/exclusions. It is hoped that these results will be available when the 2022/2023 data is refreshed in May 2024.
- 5.4. In terms of South Lanarkshire's figures relative to the Scottish results, performance was better than the Scottish average for 38 (38%) indicators and was worse than the average for 34 (33%) indicators. There are 28 (27%) indicators for which the 2022/2023 results are not yet available.
- 5.5. Following an Audit Scotland recommendation, the Forum (at its meeting on 26 November 2019) agreed to introduce a family group analysis in the annual reporting of the Council's LGBF results. The family group analysis focuses on those indicators where the Council is performing worse than the Scottish average. Based on the 2022/2023 results, this relates to 34 (33%) indicators. This analysis is attached at Appendix 2.

6. Publication of the Data

- 6.1. The 2022/2023 data has been shared on the Local Government Improvement Service interactive LGBF Dashboard - [Explore the data](#). The Local Government Improvement Service published their national overview report on 1 March 2024, which provided a high-level analysis of performance both during 2022/2023 and over the longer term. It also sets out the challenges facing councils in the context of current funding pressures, growing demand, Covid legacy and the cost of living crisis.
- 6.2. At a local level each council is required to publish its own results at the same time as the official publication by the Local Government Improvement Service. As in previous years, the LGBF results information for South Lanarkshire Council will be uploaded on to the Council's website, together with contextual information about and explaining the indicators.

7. Next Steps

- 7.1. The actions identified in the comments column in Appendix 1 will be taken forward.
- 7.2. As noted at 6.1 above, these results are to be considered final, however, a refresh of the data is scheduled to be released by the end of May 2024 following completion of the Scottish Government final validation process on the financial data, and to allow inclusion of the as yet unavailable results. Updates will be made, as appropriate, to the performance data and narrative uploaded onto the Council's website.
- 7.3. The Local Government Improvement Service organise annual benchmarking events, in which colleagues from specific services representing all local authorities are invited to attend, to come together to learn and share good practice for their particular area of operation. The Local Government Improvement Service align these events with existing networks/forums wherever possible, minimising duplication of discussions and bringing together relevant expertise. Following a break due to the Covid crisis in 2020, these events resumed via Teams during 2021. This has proved to be a popular move away from the in-person events with more interested 'performance' officers able to attend from across Scotland. In South Lanarkshire Council, where officers were unable to attend, learning materials from the events can be accessed on the Knowledge Hub.

8. Employee Implications

- 8.1. There are no employee implications.

9. Financial Implications

- 9.1. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. To further the work of the Local Government Improvement Service in relation to the LGBF, each Scottish local authority has committed to make a £2,766 (plus VAT) annual contribution, set and approved for a three-year period, namely 2021/2022 to 2023/2024. This is to be met from within existing budgets.

10. Climate Change, Sustainability and Environmental Implications

- 10.1. There are no climate change, sustainability or environmental implications as a result of this report.

11. Other Implications

- 11.1. There are no risk or other implications associated with the content of this report.

12. Equality Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements

- 12.1. This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a change to an existing policy, function or strategy and therefore, no impact assessment is required.
- 12.2. Consultation has taken place with Resources in gathering the information and explanations included within this report and appendices.

Paul Manning
Chief Executive

29 February 2024

Link(s) to Council Values/Priorities/Outcomes

- Accountable, effective, efficient and transparent
- Ambitious, self-aware and improving

Previous References

- Performance and Review Scrutiny Forum - 21 March 2023

List of Background Papers

- LGBF results 2022/2023

Contact for Further Information

If you would like to inspect the background papers or want further information, please contact:-

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