

Report

Report to:	Performance and Review Scrutiny Forum
Date of Meeting:	26 October 2021
Report by:	Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources)

Subject:	Local Government Benchmarking Framework Update
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1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of the report is to:-

- ◆ provide the Forum with an update on discussions with the Local Government Improvement Service (LGIS) and the Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) Board regarding the Benchmarking Framework and its use

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. The Forum is asked to approve the following recommendation(s):-

- (1) that the engagement with the Local Government Improvement Service and the LGBF Board to discuss issues around the LGBF be noted;
- (2) that it be noted that further work on the Council's use of the LGBF would be undertaken, as outlined in paragraph 4.7; and
- (3) that an update on this work with recommendations for the reporting of the next round of LGBF be submitted to the Forum in January 2022.

3. Background

3.1. The latest LGBF results were presented to the Forum on 18 May 2021. As in previous years, the results prompted wide-ranging questions and queries regarding specific indicators.

3.2. The Forum noted a number of issues which have been raised at the Forum several times over the last few years, relating to the use of the Scottish Household Survey, the ranking of indicators, and the need to consider each indicator within the South Lanarkshire context.

3.3. This report updates the Forum on discussions with the LGBF Board and the Local Government Improvement Service about these issues and how the Council's use of the framework can be developed going forward.

4. Background

4.1. The report on the LGBF to the Forum on 18 May 2021 contained a section which covered some of the issues which had been raised about the LGBF as a whole at previous meetings of the Forum. Specifically:-

- ◆ 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 (e.g., 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 – for example the number sampled is very small relative to the population and survey respondents are asked how satisfied they are with services even if they have not used the service in question. The Council's own surveys of service users invariably rate the services more highly than the SHS.
- ◆ 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.

4.2. In view of the discussions at the Forum and the fact that points had been raised in successive years, officers of the Council sought to raise these issues at an appropriate level with those responsible for the LGBF.

4.3. A meeting was held on 22 June 2021 with Kenneth Lawrie, Chair of the LGBF Board and Emily Lynch, LGBF Project Manager with the Local Government Improvement Service. The Council was represented by the Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources) and the Head of Communications and Strategy.

4.4. The meeting was constructive and covered a number of key points:-

- ◆ The LGBF Board are keen to hear from councils about how they are using the LGBF and especially any suggestions they may have for how the framework could be improved or made more accessible/relevant;
- ◆ A focus of the LGBF Board is to evolve the framework to ensure it reflects the challenges and opportunities arising from Covid and to support recovery efforts.
- ◆ With this, the Board wish to support the growing maturity and increasing flexibility with which councils use the framework. It is recognised that not all measures are of equal importance to each authority, and councils should *draw on* the framework suite of measures to reflect what matters to them and what is of value to their own performance approach, reflecting their own local strategic priorities and identified improvement areas.
- ◆ With this there is a recognition that the LGBF is a significant body of work and that using the framework to drive improvement – which is the key purpose – can present challenges.

4.5. At the meeting it was felt that there is potential for the Council to work with the Local Government Improvement Service to review how it uses the LGBF and, in particular, to refine the selection of indicators which are used to better reflect the Council's priorities and support scrutiny of progress in priority areas.

4.6. This work would benefit the Council by accessing LGIS expertise in LGBF and how it is used elsewhere to facilitate discussions with a view to developing a robust approach going forward. The LGIS would play the role of critical friend, expert advisor and facilitator to assist the Council and Resources to refine their use of LGBF within the context of service improvement activities.

4.7. Several strands of potential further work have also been explored with the LGIS as follows:-

- ◆ Using the LGBF strategically to inform priorities for the new Council Plan. This would see the LGIS contribute to an exercise to look at how the LGBF can illuminate issues for the Council. Using tools available such as trends over time and analysing themes which emerge from analysis of national data, the LGIS can facilitate discussions on where the Council may seek to direct improvement activity over the life of the new Council Plan. These discussions can also make use of insights from the Community Planning Outcomes Profile tool which has been developed to support Community Planning Partnerships to meet their duties under the Community Empowerment Act.
- ◆ Identifying a basket of indicators to draw from the LGBF to use alongside other data and intelligence to support monitoring and reporting activity against the strategic plan.
- ◆ Thematic discussions. The LGIS produces an overview report for Scotland as a whole which opens up insights at a thematic level. Drawing upon the data that has been generated for the LGBF over the last decade, the LGIS can produce bespoke analysis which places South Lanarkshire Council data within these larger themes and national trends, offering insight into the Council's relative performance and stimulating discussion about priorities for change.
- ◆ Service-level discussions. Focusing on specific indicators or indicator-groups, the LGIS can help engage with services on drivers of performance and the factors underlying the metrics in the LGBF. These discussions would draw on the wealth of information available through family group discussions as well as detailed knowledge of practices in other councils.
- ◆ There is also scope for review of how LGBF is used within change and improvement initiatives, such as service review processes and budget-setting/efficiency discussions.
- ◆ Using the LGBF to develop a dashboard which provides management with access to real-time data against key strategic priorities.

4.8. The Forum is asked to note that further engagement will be undertaken with the LGIS on these topics, linking in with the engagement and deliberative processes involved in the new Council Plan and Community Plan; and paving the way for a new approach to LGBF analysis and reporting for the next round of LGBF data, due for publication in early 2022.

4.9. An update on the outcome of this work will be reported to the Forum at its next meeting in January 2022.

5. Employee Implications

5.1. There are no direct employee implications.

6. Financial Implications

6.1. There are no direct financial implications.

7. Climate Change, Sustainability and Environmental Implications

7.1. There are no direct climate change, sustainability and natural environment implications arising from this report.

8. Other Implications

8.1. Considering the detail of the report and identifying actions as appropriate contribute towards effective risk management.

9. Equality Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements

- 9.1. 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.
- 9.2. There is no requirement for consultation on the content of the report.

Paul Manning

Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources)

20 September 2021

Link(s) to Council Values/Ambitions/Objectives

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

Previous References

- Performance and Review Scrutiny Forum - 18 May 2021

List of Background Papers

- None

Contact for Further Information

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

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