

LG Inform and LG Inform VfM

Purpose of report

For information.

Summary

To provide the Board with the background to LG Inform and LG Inform VfM, two data tools which the LGA developed and maintains on behalf of local authorities as part of our sector-led improvement offer. A demonstration will be given at the Improvement and Innovation Board meeting on 30 January 2018.

Recommendation

That the Improvement and Innovation Board note the developments and progress, and consider ways in which we might promote LG Inform more widely to councillors.

Action

Officers to proceed with work as directed by members.

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LG Inform and LG Inform VfM

Background

1. **LG Inform** is the LGA's on-line data and benchmarking service. This free, online service allows anyone in councils and fire and rescue services to access and compare both contextual and performance data for their local area. LG Inform was launched in the summer of 2013. It was developed to bring together the key data used by local authorities and keep it up to date, thereby releasing officers in every council and fire and rescue authority from the task of tracking down the latest data and then maintaining it, so they can spend more time on the analysis and understanding of the data instead. Helping authorities by providing quick and easy access to performance data supports improvement. But, in addition, the vast majority of data in the tool is also freely accessible to the public, so supports councils with their transparency and accountability too.
2. This year, a 'clone' of LG Inform was made in order to allow the LGA to take over the running of the Value for Money Profiles. These profiles contain mainly financial data, and were originally developed by the Audit Commission to enable auditors to make their value for money judgements of councils and fire and rescue authorities. The new tool, which is called **LG Inform VfM**, was launched at the end of November 2017 and the LGA will now maintain it.

LG Inform

3. All councils now have people signed up for LG Inform, and there are around 5,000 registered users in total (an increase of 20 per cent over the last financial year). Authority users can view data or pre-written reports, and create their own reports, using the most up to date published information. However, much of the data is on the public site and can be accessed without registering or signing in: in total there were 66,000 visits over the course of the year.
4. The database now contains around 5,500 metrics: these are usually added at local authorities' request, or because we know they are particularly relevant to local government. The database is maintained daily by the LGA and, typically, each month 3,000 updates are made to ensure the data within the database is current.
5. We have an ongoing free training programme for authorities: this comprises face to face training around the country, but also a webinar series for officers or councillors to join from their desks.

6. Although LG Inform has reached a level of maturity over the past two years, we continue to take in to account users' suggestions and fine tune the software to bring in smarter and easier ways of using LG Inform. We have worked on a number of developments and improvements this year, including a new 'outliers' function which enables users to identify areas of strong/weak performance, and more options to examine data over time.
7. The LGA Research Team also writes 'ready-made' LG Inform reports for authorities, and new reports this year include fly-tipping, demographics and sexual health. In addition, the team is currently working with MHCLG to create a report on cohesion and integration.

LG Inform VfM

8. The new LG Inform VfM tool replaces the former Audit Commission's VfM Profiles. Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA) have been maintaining them since the Audit Commission closed, but it was a resource-intensive exercise. From now on the tool and database will be updated by the LGA, in a much more efficient way, and sooner after publication of new data.

Other work associated with LG Inform

9. The LGA Research Team has been running a free data benchmarking club for local authorities. This allows them to submit data not centrally collected anywhere else, and compare with other authorities: or share data and view it earlier than they would normally see central government data. The data is published in LG Inform. It also means they save money by not needing to use commercial benchmarking clubs. Around 150 authorities take part in this. Furthermore, after a successful pilot with fire and rescue authorities in the South West, we have now launched a dedicated Fire Benchmarking Club. This collects a basket of metrics that were felt to be useful to have on a quarterly basis, rather than the bi-annual publication from the Home Office.
10. Finally, using LG Inform we are delivering a modest income stream by charging external organisations to add their data or create reports or use our data feed.

Implications for Wales

11. Both LG Inform and LG Inform VfM are for English authorities only. The Welsh Local Government Data Unit provides data for Welsh authorities.

Financial Implications

12. There is an LG Inform budget, funded from MHCLG grant, which is used for all the work on LG Inform.

Next steps

13. LG Inform and LG Inform VfM will be demonstrated in the Improvement and Innovation Board meeting. Board members are requested to note the developments and progress, give any feedback, and consider ways in which we might promote LG Inform more widely to councillors.