

Data and Transparency Programme

Purpose of report

For direction.

Summary

This report sets out the proposed work areas to be undertaken within the data and transparency programme in 2018-19. Members are asked to consider and approve in principle the data and transparency projects proposed for 2018-19 and indicate any projects which may be missing.

Recommendation

That the Improvement and Innovation Board considers and approves in principle the data and transparency projects proposed for 2018-19. Mayor Dave Hodgson is lead member for this Board priority area. Members' guidance and views on the projects and the proposed methods of delivery would also be especially welcome, along with any significant missed opportunities.

Action

Officers to progress in the light of members' views.

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Data and Transparency Programme

Background

1. Data is increasingly being recognised as important in the design, delivery and transformation of public services. It can be used to better understand our business, improve outcomes and drive efficiencies. The LGA has developed a programme of work each year which has included a number of initiatives to help authorities get a better understanding about the value of data in public services and to support them using it. It has also helped them to keep aligned with external initiatives and government directives as they become known. The work aims to encourage authorities to open up, share and better use data to:
 - 1.1 Design services around user needs
 - 1.2 Drive efficiencies within services and across the authority
 - 1.3 Support public sector transformation and digitisation
 - 1.4 Engage and empower citizens within their communities
 - 1.5 Be transparent and publicly accountable.
2. In consultation with Mayor Hodgson, lead member for this Board priority area, a set of projects and guiding principles are suggested below, to form next year's data and transparency programme. A small number of additional projects are also identified in the last section, should additional resources become available during the year.
3. The programme aims to respond to the following opportunities and challenges:
 - A. To help councils keep in step with the remarkable changes in IT capabilities and data processing in recent years, and use that to improve services, by **briefing and supporting elected members and council staff** through training days, webinars and online eLearning materials
 - B. To help councils make better use of data and intelligence to transform services and inform decisions, through **sharing learning, expertise and resources**; and enabling them (and their local partners) to self-assess the maturity of their data practices and identify where they can make improvements
 - C. To continue to **deliver local government's information standards** that drive much of their transparency and data publishing practices and enable effective data sharing and data management

- D. To **represent local government interests** in the areas of transparency, data sharing, data quality and use on the influential national boards and networks overseeing public sector data policy.
- 4. The projects to be delivered are set out below under each of the above four headings.

A. Briefing / training initiatives for elected members and officials

- 5. Recent years have seen unparalleled developments in IT technology, software capability and data practices. Elected members are often keen for their councils to embrace new digital ways of working or new analytical approaches to inform their decisions/help them improve services, but they do not always know where to start or they want to learn from others who have innovated before them.
- 6. We propose a programme of briefings and materials to keep elected members and their officers aware of data capabilities and new directives emerging from central government and from data-oriented networks, and help them learn from others.
- 7. In consultation with the sector, we will draw up a list of data topics that are worthy of training development or shared learning. Board members are also invited to make suggestions. For these topics, we will commission the production of training materials/briefings/case studies/podcasts/eLearning modules (whichever channels seem most suitable, depending on their nature).

Risks

- 8. There may be little interest in this initiative from councillors, as elected members are very busy. To mitigate this, we would aim to deliver this project through a range of media which would allow councillors to use resources at a time that is convenient to them.

B. Initiatives to work together and share resources and expertise

- 9. The many years of austerity and efficiency drives in local government have seen a significant decline in resources and skills available for data analysis, business strategy and research within the majority of authorities. However, it is well recognised that good use of data is essential within the most effective organisations.
- 10. Last year, members will recall we undertook an exercise to analyse what makes an Intelligent Council, and to identify existing guidance, resources and materials that can help authorities achieve this. In addition, we commissioned Nesta to develop a pilot online self-assessment tool that helps authorities consider the maturity of their data practices and identify where they can make improvements. The report from the Intelligent Council work and the data self-assessment tool will be launched within the next couple of months.
- 11. This year we propose to continue to work with the sector and with experts from Nesta, SOLACE and LARIA to bring these resources together into an online

knowledge sharing hub, to make them more easily accessible. This hub will be linked from the LGA's own website, and we will work with the LGA's Digital Communications Team to ensure it meets their requirements. It will act as a place for councils to come to identify and draw upon good practice in research and use of data. We will also undertake promotional work to encourage participation, and self-sustaining growth, as councils themselves add materials, and discuss issues.

Risks

12. The hub is not well-used. To mitigate this, we propose to continue our partnership with SOLACE and LARIA, in order to promote it widely. We will also try to make use of existing assets, like the Knowledge Hub, to deliver this at minimal cost.

C. Provision of information standards and best practice

13. **Standards upkeep:** For at least 15 years, the LGA and IDeA have overseen the creation and upkeep of a mature local government data standard to support the categorisation, inter-linking and sharing of its data within and between organisations. This [local government information standard](#) defines the elements of public sector service delivery at a local level. It comprises a set of controlled lists of precise data definitions and relationships between them to provide a 360° view of council operations. The intention is to tag local data with these identifiers to support easy filtering, analysis and inter-linking with other data sets. It drives many public sector data initiatives, including GOV.UK and the transparency code. It is also used by suppliers of council systems or services to give assurance that they are referring to the same subject.
14. During the forthcoming year, the standards are contributing to the development of a number of local government legal duties including housing, planning and brownfield availability, elections, libraries, universal credit, health and social care services, GDPR and related data protection activities. We propose to undertake work to ensure that the content and delivery of the standards are appropriate to meet these new priorities and others as they develop through the year.

Risks

15. Failure of central government standards groups (GDS, ODI, DCLG, and DCMS) to recognise and support the value of this local government initiative. To mitigate this, we will try to influence new standards that are created, ensure they do not duplicate existing standards, and add them to the overall local government information standard.
16. **Standards overhaul:** The information standards were initially designed in the middle of the last decade. Since that time there have been substantial changes to the way local government services are delivered, with an increasing dependency on multi-agency delivery, demarcation by "place" and regular changes to legislation. Little work has been undertaken to review or revise the content of the standards

since 2010, though they have been updated each year to reflect changes in legislation and political priorities. We propose a modest review this year to ensure that the standards remain fit for purpose.

17. A small working party of data and standards experts will be commissioned to review the local government information standard to determine that the lists remain representative of sector needs and are up-to-date.

Risks:

18. The work might prove too substantial to resource and fund, or appropriate experts (who will need to be commissioned externally) might not be available. We will decide whether to proceed once we have undertaken this initial scoping and costings.
19. **Standards practical deployment - the discovery of local services matched to citizen's needs:** The use of data standards best become a reality and understood when they address real world situations. We propose a pilot project to demonstrate how several organisations, all publishing data to a standard, can be brought together so that citizens (or their clinicians, carers and advocates) can discover local services available to meet their specific needs, for which they are eligible and which are located close to where they live. To do this, we will assemble one or two pilot areas of a few local authorities and their partners, to publish data openly about the services they deliver to a data standard that we developed in 2016.
20. Support will be needed to assist the pilots to prepare and publish their data and the lessons we learn from this. We can then commission a small number of example apps that can make use of the data. If this works, it can demonstrate to all authorities the benefits of publishing data using data standards, both for residents and for the authority itself.

Risks:

21. Progress needs commitment and senior buy-in from a selection of local authorities and their delivery partners, as there will be costs, in the form of human resources. However, we have identified one or two authorities who may be willing to take part.
22. Councils may be sensitive to the accuracy and relevance of the data they publish and the quality of services being offered by their partners. The pilot will allow us to understand more about this issue and possible solutions.

D. Representation of local government interests on national data management boards and networks.

23. There are an increasing number of networks and boards that claim to be representing government direction on data best practice and use. Experience has indicated that each of these groups are rarely connected or aligned, but they often result in decisions or outcomes that affect local authorities.
24. The LGA currently has representatives on these boards:

- 24.1 Government Digital Service/MHCLG initiative to develop a declaration of collective ambition for local government on digital transformation
 - 24.2 UK INSPIRE Compliance Board (DEFRA)
 - 24.3 Data Licensing Forum (National Archives)
 - 24.4 iStandUK Governance Board (the Local eGovernment standards body)
 - 24.5 Local Digital Coalition
 - 24.6 Several NHS, NHS Digital, Dept. of Health, Health & Social Care Boards which are trying to co-ordinate data (including social care data) and integrate care and health data.
25. We propose to represent local government interests on these boards, where they appear likely to have a notable impact on local authorities, since a lack of LGA representation could allow such groups to add unreasonable burdens or counter-productive processes on the sector. It may also result in duplication of existing resources (like the information standards).

Risks:

26. There are a large number of such groups, across many government departments, which may take up a lot of LGA resource. We propose to review them all and attend only those which we deem to be most important.

Other possible activities to be considered if additional funding or related support is available

27. Whilst negotiations with MHCLG are underway, we do not currently know the exact resourcing for this programme. Should funding allow, members are asked to consider the following projects and identify which they feel, if any, would be most useful to the sector. (Note – the initial letter reflects the theme above to which the proposal relates).
28. **A research and data skills dating service [B]** A form of 'dating service' for councils and academia. To develop a service that introduces academics (who have/are applying for grants or have students looking for placements/research projects) to local authorities who are interested in working with them; and/or introduces local authorities with particular research questions to academics who might be interested in projects to answer them.
29. **Research and data summit event [B]** In 2017 the LGA funded an event held by West Sussex County Council to bring researchers and business and data analysts together to share ideas, promote achievements and develop joint initiatives. This was a successful event. Should funds allow, we may wish to run a similar event this year (this could be an LGA event or run with West Sussex County Council again or the

local authority researchers officers' society, LARIA). We may wish to theme the event in some way, such as predictive analytics or geo-spatial data.

30. Support to the development and rollout of national local data standards [C] We represent the best interests of the sector when new requirements emerge from central government for the publication of local data to a national standard. This often creates new burdens for authorities. In recent years, therefore, we have developed tools, guidance and support aids to help local authorities prepare and participate in initiatives for the release of more open data. The following data standards are in development and we would provide support, representation and practical aids to assist local government rollout:

30.1 Elections data – candidates and results – with Cabinet Office

30.2 Libraries assets – with DCMS

30.3 Brownfield Land register – with MHCLG

30.4 Land Plans – with MHCLG

31. Some of the aids (such as data validators) may require some external resources to be commissioned. Other data themes are likely to emerge during the year.

Implications for Wales

32. All projects suggested for this programme would apply to Wales and benefit Welsh authorities equally, except for the 'additional' project to support the roll-out of national standards for local data. Welsh authorities are usually excluded from such requirements.

Financial Implications

33. The level of funding for these projects will depend on successful negotiations with MHCLG. Members are therefore asked to indicate those projects they consider highest priority.

Next steps

34. Members are asked to consider and approve in principle the data and transparency projects proposed for 2018-19, and give their view about the priority for the projects. They are also asked to indicate any projects which may be missing.

35. The Research and Information Team will take forward the data and transparency programme in light of these discussions.