

Performance data for local areas

Summary

This paper responds to the request at the last Board meeting for a report about the comparative performance information that will be available to councils and the LGA group under CAA and concern about the extent to which we will be able to spot underperformance. It also reports on research that has been carried by the LGA Group to survey the complex range of information and tools available to councils and partners. It recommends that the Improvement Board should nominate a small group of members to advise the LGA and IDeA on possible options for a local government owned “data and information function” or other support.

Recommendations

- That the Improvement Board considers and comments on the issues raised in this report.
- That the Improvement Board nominates a small group of members to advise the LGA and IDeA on options for a local government data and information function, or other support in the area of data and information.

Action

Officers from LGA and IDeA work with a nominated group of members from the Improvement Board and report back to a future meeting.

Performance data for local areas

Background

1. At the last meeting, members discussed the final CPA results for 2008. They asked for a further report about the performance information that will be available in the context of CAA, to demonstrate councils' performance, enable them to make comparisons and help the LGA group identify performance trends.
2. The new performance framework places more emphasis on self-awareness by councils and partners and more emphasis on locally relevant performance data. It aims to reduce the amount of standard data that councils are required to submit to government or inspectorates. This change does not do away with comparisons between councils, but it raises important questions about the sort of data that councils need and what might therefore be available for the sector more generally.

The current picture - performance information which is available to all councils

3. **The National Indicator Set (NIS)** – all indicators are reported for every area as part of CAA. At present the set is very large (currently 188 indicators) and of mixed quality and relevance. This is available through a **web based data hub** set up by CLG available to central government, councils, LSP partners, government offices, and inspectorates (the LGA group also has access) and allows comparisons to be made between areas, see link: <https://www.hub.info4local.gov.uk/DIHWEB/Logon/default.aspx> . There has however been a delay between councils sending their data to government departments, and those departments supplying it to the hub, creating problems in accessing the information.
4. CAA reports an **area assessment** by the joint inspectorates in the form of a narrative that is unscored. CAA also reports an **organisational assessment** that is scored for every council. Each score is on a 1 – 4 scale where 1 denotes poor performance and 4 denotes excellent performance. The Audit Commission have indicated however that this will be a 'harder test'.
5. **Other gradings** - Ofsted will provide an annual grade of the performance of children's services and the new Care Quality Commission will assess councils' delivery of adult social care services using the same 4 point scale referred to above. These grades will contribute to the organisational assessment score but will be published separately at the same time.

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6. One of the ways the inspectorates intend to report CAA is through a new **CAA website** being developed by the Audit Commission, which will enable councils to make comparisons.
7. **The place survey** – all councils are required to carry out this postal survey of their residents, to a standard format (often jointly by counties and districts in two tier areas) to gather data on residents' perceptions. (Paper 4b provides more on this.)
8. Councils have always collected and will continue to collect **purely local performance information** which could include previous best value performance indicators, locally developed indicators, research outputs and customer insight.
9. Councils have formed and are forming **benchmarking clubs**. The Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships (RIEPs) are also now helping authorities with this benchmarking. For example, Capital Ambition (the RIEP for London) has made a bid to CLG to fund a unit designed to give London councils the ability to compare a whole range of nationally and locally collected data.

Opportunities for comparison

10. To summarise, the NIS (via the hub), CAA itself, the place survey and benchmarking services all offer opportunities for councils to compare performance, although there are limitations and flaws in some of these options, requiring some caution in making comparisons. Most of this will be available to the LGA group to help shape priorities and/or spot early signs of underperformance, either as public data or through informal sharing. In addition, with CAA being an iterative process where problems will be flagged early with councils and new mechanisms being proposed in *Setting the Pace*, it is expected that the LGA group will be well placed to be able to identify improvement trends and spot early signs of underperformance.
11. Perhaps of greater concern for the LGA group in the short term is what this new set of performance information, with a new focus on outcomes and a harder test of corporate performance, will suggest about the trend in council improvement.

What information do councils need?

12. Initial scoping has been undertaken to explore councils' data needs and consider whether a local government owned "data and information function" might be desirable and feasible; and what other help, if any, might be provided by the Group.
13. This found that there is a great deal of data available to councils and partnerships, but they do not always have the ability or capacity to use it. There are also gaps in information or it is scattered across a range of sources making it time-consuming to collate. There are key areas where councils could potentially benefit from LGA Group support. These range from small, quick wins

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such as sharing knowledge on research/data suppliers and services using a Community of Practice (low cost) to larger initiatives such as setting up a local government-owned benchmarking system (higher cost).

14. Officers would like to develop this work and would welcome member input to ensure any support that is developed meets the needs of members in councils. **We recommend that the Improvement Board nominates a group of interested members to advise the LGA and IDeA on progressing this work.**

Financial Implications

15. None arising directly from this report. Decisions about LGA Group data and information support could have additional resource implications.

Implications for Wales

16. The new performance framework including CAA and the National Indicator Set applies to England only. Issues concerning the wider data and information needs of councils and areas are generally applicable to local government although the role of the Welsh Local Government Data Unit would need to be considered for any plans involving Wales.