Algorithm Register: Update

Purpose of report

For information.

Summary

Following instruction from Improvement and Innovation Board (IIB) lead members, the Research and Information Team has undertaken a discovery exercise to explore the possibility of a local government algorithm register.

This discovery has led us to a project to create a government register which is already underway, led by the Cabinet Office. The focus has mainly been on central government users, but the LGA will now join it, to ensure that the resulting register works for local authorities as well.

Is this report confidential? Yes ☐ No ☒

Action

IIB is asked to note that the LGA will be joining the project to create a government algorithm register, and the details of that project contained within this paper.

Contact officer:	Juliet Whitworth / Tim Adams
Position:	Head of Research and Information / Programme Manager – Data
Phone no:	020 7664 3287 / 07789 937675
Email:	juliet.whitworth@local.gov.uk / tim.adams@local.gov.uk

18 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ   www.local.gov.uk   Telephone 020 7664 3000   Email info@local.gov.uk   Chief Executive: Mark Lloyd

Local Government Association company number 11177145 Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government company number 03675577

Algorithm Register: Update

1. **Background**

   1.1 The use of predictive analytics and algorithm interventions in decision making in local authorities remains at an early stage. Comparatively, their use is not currently widespread, but there is increasing interest and both support and concern being expressed by different commentators. As a result, the LGA is running a programme on advanced and predictive analytics, to support the sector to undertake such work successfully, but ethically and with good governance.

   1.2 In November 2021, a paper was presented to Improvement and Innovation Board (IIB) lead members with a proposal to investigate an algorithm register for local government. This would be a place where local authorities can upload details of projects involving predictive analytics or using algorithms in their organisation, along with such details as the techniques being used, risk assessments, and information about the level of human involvement in any decision that is made.

   1.3 The intention of this open approach was to:
   * encourage transparency
   * create a one-stop shop for citizens to find out how their data is used
   * prompt councils to think carefully about ethics, information governance and other good practice in the knowledge it will be published, and
   * allow councils to share what they are doing with others and learn from each other.

   1.4 The lead members gave a positive reception to our proposal but encouraged that we first undertake a *discovery phase* to identify what work in this area is already underway elsewhere, along with any due diligence undertaken by these groups to ensure that shared working and common learning is taken on board if approval is given to approve any next steps.

2. **Update**

   2.1 During December and January, members of the Research and Information Team made contact with other groups and identified that substantial work is already underway in other sectors.

   2.2 Our discovery work identified existing registers already developed by the City of Amsterdam, the City of Helsinki and some in the United States; while in the UK, initiatives are at an earlier stage. But we have discovered a number underway within the UK public sector already, and there are signs that some of these

disparate groups are collaborating to progress a common and comprehensive solution.

2.3   Within local government, early thinking has started with the London Office of Technology and Innovation (LOTI), with the Society for Innovation, Technology and Modernisation (SOCITM) and in a small number of local authorities.

2.4   Probably furthest progressed is a central government project. A project team has been assembled with approved funding and sufficient capacity to consult and develop a national solution. This work is being led by the Cabinet Office through its specialised teams at the Central Digital and Data Office (CDDO) and the Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation (CDEI). The team has been undertaking early discovery work throughout the second half of 2021 and has already built a relationship with other expert partners to advise on their work. The partnership includes: the Ada Lovelace Institute, the Alan Turing Institute, the Committee on Standards in Public Life, the Open Government Partnership, the AI Now Institute and the Westminster think tank, *Reform*.

2.5   We have made contact with all the UK projects. The Cabinet Office project is further developed, and their work obviously has good provenance. However, it is also in a sufficiently early stage to allow our closer working to bring the local government sector into their planning. At the moment their focus is mainly on central government departments.

2.6   The project is part of the government's National Data Strategy and National Artificial Intelligence (AI) Strategy. It is seen as a key contribution to the policy directive to share information on government's use of algorithmic tools with the public.

2.7   The approach being taken is to:
- assemble contributing experts to develop the register, while consulting with potential users
- pilot it with early adopters
- evaluate the approach and refine it.

2.8   Our discovery work has indicated that the most impact and best progress will be made if the LGA joins forces with the central Cabinet Office project and ensures they achieve wider involvement from interested local authorities. This approach will save money, reduce the likelihood of competing solutions and create clarity for citizens (who do not necessarily differentiate between and local and central government services).

2.9   The Cabinet Office Team is very receptive to us working with them, and has given reassurance that we are sufficiently early in the project's development cycle to influence strategy and ensure a solution that works well within the local authorities.

2.10 As a result, lead members of the Improvement and Innovation Board have agreed to us joining the project.

3   **Implications for Wales**

3.1   The resulting register will be used across the whole of the United Kingdom, so is directly relevant to Welsh authorities. If we identify any, we will encourage Welsh authorities using algorithms to be part of this project.

4. Financial implications

4.1 At the moment, there are no identified costs to us joining this project.

5. Equality and diversity implications

5.1 In developing specifications, tools and guidance materials as part of this initiative forward, we will work closely with the other delivery partners to ensure that the programme is ensuring that any aspects do not adversely impact those users with protected characteristics. Focus on guidance materials will also encourage publishers to bear in mind the diverse range of users of their algorithms, features and ease of use.

6. Next steps

6.1 On joining the project, we will encourage wider participation by those councils already making use of algorithms or predictive analytics, and be involved in activities such as:
- promoting the concept and benefits of a central open register of algorithms through articles, blogs, newsletters and networks
- running a webinar to describe the background, vision and approach being taken
- recruiting a number of councils to join the pilot
- contributing to the review of outcomes achieved, learning and any benefits realised or disadvantages identified
- contributing to 'next steps' considerations.