

Office for Local Government (Oflog) Launch

Purpose of Report

For information.

Is this report confidential? No

Summary

This report provides an update for the Board on the newly launched Office for Local Government (Oflog). The paper covers the LGA's engagement to date, key areas to note and next steps.

LGA Plan Theme: ***Strengthening our Voice***

Recommendation

Members are asked to note the newly launched Office for Local Government and proposed next steps.

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Oflog Launch

Background

1. The [Levelling Up White Paper](#), launched in February 2022, stated a new data body would be established and the UK Government would work with local leaders, citizens and sector experts to ensure the body focused on local data, transparency and outcomes. It was stated the body would strengthen local data to empower citizens with greater knowledge of their place and support local authorities to learn from one another and be more user focused.
2. In a speech to the sector in July 2022, Secretary of State Michael Gove MP provided a further steer on the body by announcing the new Office for Local Government (Oflog) which would 'shine a light on how local authorities are performing and delivering'. A year later, Oflog was [formally launched at the LGA Annual Conference on 4 July 2023](#) in a speech by the Secretary of State.
3. Oflog is intended to provide 'authoritative and accessible data and analysis about the performance of local government and support its improvement'. It exists as an office of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), with a stated ambition of starting small and being developed iteratively, and eventually becoming independent.
4. To start, Oflog has brought together some existing data around four themes (waste management, adult social care, adult skills and finance) into its newly created [Local Authority Data Explorer](#). A [policy paper](#) has also been published setting out the context, rationale and approach to setting up Oflog, including its scope and future functions.

Engagement

5. LGA Improvement and Innovation Board Chair, Cllr Abi Brown, alongside sector leaders and LGA officers has been lobbying on behalf of local government since the body was first announced in the Levelling Up White Paper last year.
6. Minister for Local Government, Lee Rowley MP, attended the LGA Councillors Forum earlier this year to talk about Oflog and Cllr Abi Brown met with him separately. Cllr Abi Brown discussed introducing a regular meeting for political group leaders on Oflog with the Minister and as a result a political leaders' group was established.
7. LGA officers meet fortnightly with DLUHC officials and have provided briefings for council leaders and chief executives who have had individual meetings with the Interim Chair of Oflog, Lord Amyas Morse. Lord Morse attended the LGA Annual

Conference and spoke at a session on sector-led improvement and assurance which was chaired by Cllr Abi Brown. Cllr Abi Brown has also met with Interim Chief Executive of Oflog, Josh Goodman to share LGA views.

Areas of concern

8. LGA Chair, Cllr Shaun Davies, responded to the launch of Oflog in a [press release](#) raising areas of concern for the sector.
9. The response highlighted the following key areas:
 - 9.1. Given local government already has a very strong record of data transparency, supported by our freely available, award-winning data platform, [LG Inform](#), the sector questions the need for the Local Authority Data Explorer.
 - 9.2. Co-production with the sector will be crucial in future iterations of the dashboard to make it more meaningful locally. Government should deepen its engagement with councils to identify and define future sets of metrics. Importantly the dashboard should include a wider set of metrics, not just about council performance, but about activity and spend of the rest of the public sector (including central government) that is happening in each local authority area. This will help councillors with their place-shaping role, working with those public sector partners.
 - 9.3. There needs to be greater clarity around how this platform fits together with other dashboards proposed by the Department for Education and work on indicators being undertaken by the Department for Health and Social Care.
10. Since its launch, LGA officers have been looking carefully at the data and have some questions and observations about some of the metrics officials have chosen, particularly those related to the finance and adult social care themes. Officers are raising these issues directly with Government.
11. It should be noted, and LGA officers are reflecting on a point in the [Oflog Policy paper](#) referred in point 4 which indicates that Oflog intends to use the data “to inform whether a dialogue needs to be opened with any such local authority. If so, Oflog may convene this conversation, **bringing in local leaders and experts from the sector** to explore what is happening on the ground and whether the indicators are correct in giving an early warning that something is amiss.”
12. Some commentators have suggested the Oflog dashboard is ‘dreary and uninviting’ ([Local Government Chronicle, 13 July](#)) and, therefore, LGA officers have created a [new report in LG Inform](#) which contains all the metrics. It is hoped the sector finds the report more visually appealing. Users can choose their

authority at the top of the report (and change comparison group) and it also contains wider contextual information.

Next steps

13. Given Oflog remains an ongoing project, LGA officers and political leaders will continue to work with Government to ensure the sector voice informs the next stages of development and future iterations of the tool and ensure immediate questions around the choice of metrics are shared with Government.

Implications for Wales

14. The body has an English only remit, but we will continue to share information with Welsh Councils and the WLGA as appropriate.

Financial Implications

15. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. However, in the short term, resources have had to be prioritised across the LGA to ensure the LGA can represent the sector on this issue. If there are on-going resource implications for the LGA as a result of the work on Oflog these will be considered by the LGA Board.

Equalities implications

16. The LGA is committed to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) standards. These standards are factored in across all of our engagement activity.