

1. SUMMARY

1.1 This paper informs the PRS Committee about the development of the Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) and proposes a series of quarterly scrutiny reviews using the results of benchmarking activity.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that the Committee

- (a) notes the content of this report and
- (b) agrees the proposed quarterly reporting framework in paragraph 3.6.

3. DETAIL

3.1 Comparative performance of Scottish Councils has been published annually since 2001, when a suite of over 50 Statutory Performance Indicators (SPIs) was introduced. These SPIs were defined by Audit Scotland and were included in the statutory Direction from the Accounts Commission for Scotland to all Scottish Councils. Over the years, the suite of SPIs has evolved and changed to take account of changing priorities.

3.2 Scottish councils, through the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SoLACE) commissioned the Improvement Service (IS) to develop a replacement for the SPIs, to align with changing priorities and improved reporting methods. The resulting Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) has been approved by the Accounts Commission as a replacement for the statutory defined indicators (SPIs).

3.3 The four-fold purpose of the LGBF is clear: (i) to help councils and their services understand why they achieve their current performance levels (ii) to build our understanding of where councils' performance varies (iii) to build our understanding of why performance variation occurs (iv) to identify and share good practice across councils.

3.4 The LGBF is large and complex, dealing with over 50 indicators across a range of service topics, providing comparative information across all 32 Scottish councils as well as within the two smaller 'Family Groups' of eight councils. Additionally, three years of data are now available, providing absolute values, comparative values (rank) and trends (2010-11, 2011-12, 2012-13).

3.5 Officers have participated in two Family Groups to review the LGBF data and consider the causes and drivers of variation in performance. The Improvement Service is due to publish a report in June 2014 of the findings from these and the other six Family Group meetings. The resulting report will assist Members, managers and officers to identify and implement improvements. This

report will be presented to the PRS Committee in August (Family Group findings in the proposal below). This report is also expected to outline the resources needed to fulfil the future requirements of the LGBF. So far, two meetings of each Family Group have been supported, requiring approximately 4 person-days of preparatory work and 8 person-days attendance at meetings - this has covered only two of the 56 indicators. Future plans are expected to be included in the IS report due in June.

3.6 It is proposed that the PRS Committee receive a quarterly report so that the full breadth of the LGBF is presented annually. The proposal is as follows.

May 2014 – overview of the LGBF (this paper) and agreement on future scrutiny
August 2014 – Children’s Services, Social Work Services, Family Group findings
November 2014 - Culture & Leisure, Environmental, Assets, Economic Development
February 2015 – Corporate Services, all Customer Satisfaction measures
May 2015 – full 4-year dataset 2010-2014: Family Group rankings

3.7 Although the LGBF is new, the practice of benchmarking is embedded across the council. Committee members should note the extensive use of benchmarks in Service scorecards, using national data to benchmark where available. Some services employ benchmarking data through external organisations, including Roads (SCOTS - Society of Chief Officers of Transportation in Scotland), ICT (Socitm – Society of Information Technology Management) and Building Standards (Scottish Government approved Balanced Scorecard). The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) also facilitates a range of benchmarking groups and families. The LGBF data are already reported through Service scorecards, ensuring continued focus on the national performance picture.

3.8 The Improvement Service hosts the LGBF on their website, where the full dataset for all Scottish councils is available, covering all 56 indicators for the past three years. <http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/benchmarking/>

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 The Local Government Benchmarking Framework is a positive development in improving services. Through careful alignment with council priorities, focused work will enable Argyll and Bute Council to share best practice with the other Scottish councils.

4.2 If the PRS Committee agrees the proposal in paragraph 3.6, the full range of indicators in the LGBF will be scrutinised by the Committee over the coming year.

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