

**Benchmarking Update**

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**Executive Summary**

The purpose of this report is to update the Performance Review and Scrutiny Committee on the benchmarking activity that is taking place within the Council. Argyll and Bute Council have been working with the Improvement Service, using the Local Government Benchmarking framework data to identify areas where the Council could share best practice or learning with other Councils. An initial report has been produced by the Improvement Service and consultation around this has taken place with Executive Directors. It is proposed that the next stage of benchmarking activity uses the key themes identified through stage one for further more detailed analysis. In addition it is proposed that the format provided by the Improvement Service forms the basis of the next stage of benchmarking activity which will provide context to the data.

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**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Performance Review and Scrutiny Committee (PRSC) on the ongoing work with the Improvement Service around benchmarking and to outline proposals for the next stage of benchmarking activity.

**2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 It is recommended that PRSC note the contents of this report including the proposed template and approach for stage two of the Council's benchmarking activity.

**3.0 DETAIL**

- 3.1 The Council's Improvement manager has been working with the Improvement Service to explore how the Local Government Benchmarking framework information can be used to support the Council in identifying and exploring areas where our performance differs to other authorities and where possible to share learning and good practice.
- 3.2 To date the Improvement Service has provided an initial benchmarking report and consultation around this has taken place with Executive Directors. This work has identified areas where variances can be quite easily explained and therefore may not warrant further analysis and area which may be valuable for further exploration and more detailed analysis. A follow up meeting with the Improvement Service took place on 15<sup>th</sup> May to discuss the outcome of this consultation. This meeting presented an opportunity for the Improvement Manager to feedback some key points from the consultation work that was undertaken with departments.
- 3.3 The representative from the Improvement Service acknowledged there are difficulties with some indicators which results in them being less valuable in terms of comparison and confirmed that refinement for most of these is already being picked up through family groups. Argyll and Bute's enthusiasm to engage with the framework was noted. It was proposed given some of the unique challenges we are presented with, that the Council's Improvement Manager is invited to attend the LGBF Steering Group to provide input from a rural perspective. The steering group meets four times per year in advance of board meetings to ensure discussions by the board are influenced by priorities identified by the steering group.

- 3.4 The framework is made up of a number of indicators, many of which focus on cost and satisfaction. In general consultation has shown that the reliability of satisfaction measures in the LGBF could be improved and work is ongoing around proposals for improved measures in this regard. Similarly for cost measures Argyll and Bute's challenging geography often affects the cost of delivering services.
- 3.5 The engagement from departments in the consultation around the discussion of the data in the outline report was extremely beneficial. These discussions were positive and allowed officers to engage with the data and provide a detailed context around the indicators that provided a far richer context than the indicators alone. This allowed explanation of some obvious differences e.g. geography, issues with data collection and reporting that would not warrant further exploration.
- 3.6 The Improvement Service have developed a crib sheet (Appendix One) for councils to use which provides a template that would allow for the rich contextual information from the consultation to be included when reporting performance on the framework indicators. Appendix Two is an example of how West Dunbartonshire Council used the crib sheet as part of their public performance reporting.
- 3.7 It is proposed that the themes within the crib sheet form the basis of the next stage of the Council's benchmarking report and that links to this would then be included in the Council's performance reporting pages on the website. During the consultation with departments references were made to internal indicators and other benchmarking activity that could be relevant to some of the areas within the benchmarking framework. It is proposed that the production of the second stage of the benchmarking report would present an opportunity for departments to agree which additional benchmarking information would be included for more detailed analysis.
- 3.8 The consultation around some indicators, for example sickness absence and collection of council tax resulted in a desire to learn more about the approach of other authorities and what is included in their figures. In addition some areas of further analysis were identified that may prove helpful in terms of enhancing the understanding of the indicators, for example further analysis on whether age profile may impact on sickness absence statistics. The Improvement Service are happy to support any additional analysis and this can be included within the scope of the proposed template.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

In conclusion this report provides an update on the benchmarking work to date and outlines a proposed approach for the next stage of the analysis and presentation of information.

## **5.0 IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Policy: Benchmarking can be used to inform areas of further scrutiny in terms of the outcomes achieved

- 5.2 Financial: Benchmarking allows cost comparison in a number of areas and shared learning where appropriate
- 5.3 Legal: Benchmarking supports the Council in its delivery best value
- 5.4 HR: None
- 5.5 Equalities: None
- 5.6 Risk:
- 5.7 Customer Service: Shared learning through benchmarking can lead to improved customer service

**Jane Fowler, Head of Improvement and HR**

**For further information contact:** Carolyn McAlpine, Improvement Manager 01546 604 021

**APPENDICES**

- Appendix 1: Improvement Service Crib Sheet
- Appendix 2: West Dunbartonshire Example