

# Performance management guide for local authority officers



Throughout this workbook you will encounter different types of information, and suggested actions, indicated by the symbols shown below:



**Guidance** – this icon indicates guidance such as definitions, quotations and research.



**Challenges** – this icon indicates questions asking you to reflect on your role or approach.



**Case studies** – this icon indicates examples of approaches used in different settings.



**Hints and tips** – this icon indicates best practice advice.



**Useful links** – this icon indicates sources of additional information.

# Foreword

This guide has been developed as part of the Local Government Association's Government-funded 'sector support offer' for 2021/2022. It aims to provide ideas, tools and approaches which can help local authority officers deliver effective performance management in collaboration with local councillors.

We know that this is a time of change for many local authorities as they recover and renew from the COVID-19 pandemic. Many authorities are using this opportunity to rethink their strategies, partnership approaches, and engagement with citizens. As this work is underway, it feels timely to ensure that officers are equipped with the information they need to understand the extent to which the actions of their council are effective and making the type of progress which is important to citizens.

Alongside this guide for officers, the LGA has also prepared a similar guide for councillors.

In developing both guides, we have undertaken a review of evidence concerning effective performance management in councils. We have also engaged directly with councillors and officers through a workshop and three focus groups. In addition, a smaller group of officers and councillors have read and provided comments on initial drafts. In total, around 30 people have given their time and expertise to help inform this guidance and we are immensely grateful for their input.

Thank you for reading this guide. We hope it inspires you to think about new ways to approach performance management. And, ultimately, we hope that brings real benefits for the people living in your local area.

We are interested in feedback and improvements, so please do email the team at [transparency@local.gov.uk](mailto:transparency@local.gov.uk) with your suggestions and ideas about additional resources which might be useful and ways in which this guide could be amended and improved to add greater value.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter', with a horizontal line underneath it.

**Councillor Peter Fleming OBE**

Chair, LGA Improvement and Innovation Board

# Contents

**Thank you to Cordis Bright Ltd who worked with us to facilitate the workshops and to lead the authoring.**

Performance management checklist	6
1. Introduction to performance management	8
What is performance management?	8
Why is performance management important?	9
2. Creating a constructive performance management culture	10
Trust, openness, and space to admit errors	10
A culture of curiosity and inquiry	12
Assessing performance improvement culture	13
3. Roles and working relationships	15
Understanding and defining roles	15
Involving, enthusing, and supporting councillors	19
Building strong working relationships	19
Sharing information and learning	21
4. Developing an approach which enables improvement	24
The role of scrutiny	24
Building on existing approaches	26
5. Developing a performance management framework	28
Linking to strategy and the council plan	28
What gets measured gets done (and the problems this creates)	29
Systems and tools to support performance management	31
Allowing for nuance and continual improvement	35

6. Creating performance measures	39
Generating the theme and indicators	39
Common sources of performance information	41
7. Getting and using the right data	44
Gathering evidence and using existing data	44
Using both qualitative and quantitative data	45
Ensuring the citizen's perspective is included	48
8. Analysing and presenting the data	52
Approaches to analysis	52
Presenting the data	52
Understanding the support available	57
9. Appendix	59
Definitions of key terms used in this guidance	59

# Performance management checklist

This checklist draws out the key questions that officers working on performance management will want to consider when reviewing their council's approach.

## Questions to explore when starting to think about performance management (see Section 1):

Do key staff and councillors in the council understand what performance management is and why it is important?

## Questions to explore when looking at the council's performance management culture (see Section 2) and considering roles (see Section 3):

Is there a shared understanding about how performance management can be used to inform improvement?

Is there trust, openness, and a culture of inquiry?

How are the working relationships in your council? Can links and partnerships be strengthened?

Is there a culture of sharing information and learning? Are existing structures in place to encourage this, like workshops or networks?

## Questions to explore when planning the approach (see Section 4):

What are the existing structures and approaches in your council that enable improvement?

How can you build on these?

## Questions to explore when setting measures and developing a framework (see sections 5 and 6):

Are you clear on what success looks like to you?

How does this link to the council's overall strategy, corporate plan, departmental plan, and individual appraisals or workplans? How does it link to national initiatives?

To what extent are there commonly shared outcomes across the council and among partners?

Is there a model which you would like to inform your performance management approach? For example, you may wish to use a balanced scorecard or a theory of change model.

Do the measures allow for nuance, improvement, and analysis of trends? Are they realistic but also ambitious?

Is benchmarking available?

Are the measures SMART or FABRIC?<sup>1</sup> Are they outcomes-focused?

Is this making use of existing data, or does it require new data to be collected? Is there a minimal burden on the frontline service collecting this? Is there any existing data that could contribute to this that is not currently being used?

## Questions to explore when gathering and presenting the data (see sections 7 and 8):

Is there a mix of qualitative and quantitative data, if appropriate? That is, can we understand cost, quality and opinion? (How did we do? What difference did it make?)

How will the citizen's voice be captured?

Can the data be shared in a way that is easy to understand? Are there graphics, simple language, charts?

Does the presentation allow context and nuance around the data? Is there space for narrative around the graphs / charts?

Does the data presentation allow and encourage challenge from the scrutiny committee and councillors with responsibility for the services?

When you have presented the data, how is it then used to influence performance?

A glossary of key terms can be found in the Appendix.

# 1. Introduction to performance management

## What is performance management?

For councils, performance management is about using data to inform action that will improve outcomes for people.

Performance management is not a new concept. It is, however, a critical way for local government to take responsibility for its own performance and for the public and national governments to hold local service providers to account, ensuring that they respond to local needs and that public money is being spent wisely.

**A performance management framework is not about adding yet another layer of bureaucracy, indicators, metrics, or targets on top of what is already required of managers; it's intended to build on the systems and processes already in place.**

Local authority officer

The umbrella term 'performance management' includes a range of processes, techniques, and methods to identify shared goals and various measurements of progress towards these. It is also closely related to the concept of governance and making sure arrangements are in place so that an authority's objectives can be achieved.

Poorly designed performance management can encourage defensive behaviour. It can lead to an obsession with being 'above average' on every measure, hitting targets regardless of unintended outcomes, and looking at numbers without understanding how they relate to outcomes and the lives of local citizens.

Importantly, good performance management focuses on progress and change. It can be easy to focus attention and resources on a relatively static process that defines and monitors key performance indicators (KPIs). But the real value of performance management lies in a dynamic process, which will equip leaders with the information they need to make decisions and encourage change.

The challenge is to generate a performance management approach that focuses on both proving what has happened already and improving what happens next.



# Why is performance management important?

The importance of performance management has been set out in several government documents, such as the Local Government Act of 1999, which requires that services are: 'responsive to the needs of citizens, of high quality and cost-effective, and fair and accessible to all who need them'. There is also statutory guidance on 'best value duty' (2011 and 2015), where authorities are under a general duty of best value to: 'make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness'.

If you do not measure results, you cannot tell positive progress from problematic progress. Understanding this difference is key. Positive progress must be highlighted so that you can reward it and build on it: problematic progress must be highlighted so that you can correct and learn from it. Importantly, if you can demonstrate good results, you can win public support for bringing about change.

It can be helpful to think about the value of performance management at different levels within the council (see diagram). Performance management is often seen as a tool for strategic leadership. However, used well, each piece of performance management data can influence improvement and progress at a range of levels in a local authority.



# 2. Creating a constructive performance management culture

Effective performance management is not just about developing technically good indicators and measures. It is equally important to establish a culture where there is a desire and commitment to have an evidence-based improvement approach, where staff have permission to test their ideas with the freedom to fail and learn.

Performance management can unwittingly be designed in a way that encourages defensive behaviour and apathy. For example, if discussions about performance tend to feel like an interrogation, those participating will be more likely to prepare a defence than to begin a discussion about options for improvement.

The following aspects are key to creating a culture that allows performance management to be approached positively.

## Trust, openness, and space to admit errors

A focus on performance improvement requires the ability to make mistakes, acknowledge these, and learn from them. Performance improvement requires fostering trust and openness within the working culture of the organisation. People must be encouraged to give and receive feedback openly, to make and learn from mistakes, and to trust that they will not be blamed for 'poor' performance.

**'There needs to be a culture of mistakes being allowed. For example, business people in the US have failures and bankruptcies and you hear about them. Mistakes are useful to know, and people need not be afraid of sharing them.'**

Workshop participant

Having an agreed set of corporate values which are effectively implemented plays a key role in maintaining positive organisational culture at all levels.<sup>2</sup> This agreement must come from the highest level of the council which means it can be difficult for officers to generate this culture themselves without significant support from councillors.



### **Case study: the importance of senior buy-in**

Rochdale Borough Council found that when developing a performance management approach and procuring the system, senior organisational buy-in from the start has been key to ensuring that the approach becomes embedded in the culture of the organisation.

This was achieved by providing reports to lead portfolio holders and cascading these to the leadership team, showing them the system and how it will benefit the organisation. Once staff were going to be asked to use the system, communications were sent corporately as well as via services to ensure that directors and heads of service were aware. A strong message from senior management to say, 'this is what we are doing as an organisation' and that key stakeholders will view the outputs, was seen as key to ensuring the system was actually used.

Early engagement with senior colleagues has also ensured a full understanding of what they want from the system and that what it produces will be of benefit.

However, officers play an important role in ensuring this open culture can be generated. Officers must remain alert and responsive to suggestions from councillors who have the capacity to generate a higher level of trust, openness and opportunity to learn from errors. They should also be proactive in making suggestions to councillors regarding the need for culture change activities.



### **Case study: creating a culture of openness**

Basildon Council noted that, over the last two years, their performance management culture has changed and developed significantly. Starting with the outcomes-based accountability approach, it was important for managers and teams to be part of the process of change rather than having this imposed upon them. A number of workshops were held by the programme and performance team who worked closely with directors, managers and teams to change the way the organisation looks at performance, particularly exceptions (areas of particularly good or poor performance).

The council is starting to create a transparent reporting system, where services are more assured of sharing areas of underperformance. This is supported by a 'no blame' culture, and support is made available in order to prevent problems or provide intervention from other resources, as needed.

The council's new performance management framework aims to embed a culture where performance management is led and owned by appropriate officers across the organisation, including being held accountable for any challenges that arise directly. Having a 'no blame' culture across all levels of the organisation has been important and this started at senior leadership level.

It can be difficult for councillors and officers to accept and engage with culture change. It is therefore critical to set up clear communication channels so that people feel engaged in the process and have the opportunity to influence the new approach.



**Tip: encourage new staff to share their experiences and approaches**

A helpful way to embed cultural change is to build on the positive approaches of new staff who join the council. Rochdale Borough Council noted that new staff often bring fresh interest in performance management, and some come from organisations where these systems are well established and standard practice. They found this prior experience and positive approach proved helpful in starting to embed cultural change. New staff can spark conversations and lead by example regardless of their role or seniority.

## A culture of curiosity and inquiry

Effective performance management requires a culture of inquiry and curiosity at all levels of the organisation, where the goal is improvement and progress. This is different from more traditional approaches where, for example, a target is aimed for and seen as 'complete' when the target is met (see Section 6), or where highlighting problems leads to an undue focus on blame and apportioning responsibility.



**Case study: Challenging and reviewing targets**

When designing their revised performance management framework, lead members, directors and service leads in Cheshire West and Chester Council worked with officers to propose four years of targets and measures covering the life of the council plan. These proposals were reviewed and challenged by the scrutiny task group, particularly considering whether proposed targets achieved the appropriate balance between ambition and realism.

The council also established an annual review. In this, officers work with portfolio holders to review the measures and targets in light of policy developments, national and regional benchmarks, recent performance, and the wider context. All the proposed changes are then considered by scrutiny as part of the year-end performance reporting, with scrutiny recommendations, proposals and the year-end performance report then going to the cabinet for a decision.

'Appreciative inquiry' is a well-established method for enabling improvement through a positive focus on curiosity and openness.



### Challenge: 'Appreciative inquiry' in performance management

- Can you identify a recent action or activity that went really well? What made it positive?
- What was your / our contribution to making it a positive experience?
- How did other people contribute to making it a positive experience?
- Were there other factors that helped?
- Can you identify two or three ways that the action could have been even better?
- Thinking about other similar activities that you have been involved in, can you think of things that would help to ensure that this very positive experience could become more typical?
- If you had three wishes for how we might ensure this very positive experience could become more typical, what would they be?



#### Useful links:

[NHS guidance on Appreciative Inquiry](#)

## Assessing performance improvement culture

There are no clear quantitative measures to assess the effectiveness of a council's culture<sup>3</sup>. Rules and procedures alone cannot achieve good governance, and shared values should be integrated into the culture of an organisation and then reflected in behaviour and policy.

However, assessing the council against the following standards will help to ensure that an improvement culture is prioritised and provide insight about the issues which may prevent progress towards this aspiration:

## Guidance: Standards for creating a performance management culture



**Leadership:** leadership which encourages learning and an infrastructure which enables learning (for example, sufficient time, resources, experience).



**Staff involvement and commitment:** a real commitment from staff is needed in order to create a culture throughout all levels of the organisation.



**Transparency:** a culture where staff are actively encouraged to flag risks or concerns can help prevent failure and create a context of welcome reflection when failure does occur.



**Willingness to learn from poor performance:** similarly, a willingness to reflect upon and learn from previous poor performance is required to focus on improvement in the future.



**Communication and language:** good internal communication of performance management, for instance, promoting good practice and communicating successes.



**Support and advice:** it goes without saying that staff should be able to access support and advice when they need it, to create a positive culture of learning and growth.



**Reinforcement:** Demonstrating the benefits of performance management to staff and celebrating successes is effective in raising the credibility of performance measurement.

# 3. Roles and working relationships

## Understanding and defining roles

Councillors and officers have different roles to play in performance management.

Councillors largely focus on strategic elements, although they are likely to have an interest in operational matters – and their operational insights will be important in informing strategy. They will assign actions and indicators to the relevant service leads (officers) who then take responsibility for their execution.

A councillor's role is to:

- represent members of the public
- provide leadership and direction to the council
- assist officers to set goals by providing guidance on the outcomes they want to see
- scrutinise service delivery and performance.

Officers provide highly valuable information. Their input may offer clarification, provide evidence, question assumptions, establish the validity of key data, further explore ideas, and provide challenge.

An officer's role is to:

- implement the policies agreed by councillors
- organise and deliver services
- monitor and report on progress against agreed goals
- provide unbiased, professional advice and support to councillors
- use performance data to ensure councillors can make informed decisions.

While their roles are different, councillors and officers work together to lead and manage their councils to provide services that improve people's lives. It is therefore everyone's responsibility to aim to enhance the authority's performance.

In practice, the distinct roles and boundaries are sometimes blurred, so councillors and officers must understand how each role fits together. It is important to develop a shared understanding of managing performance across service areas and activity, so they can work in partnership to create an effective performance management process and culture.



## Guidance

This table outlines the main roles and responsibilities within councils. Not all roles apply to all councils. For example, authorities may have a mayor or leader operating with a cabinet or make decisions through a committee system. And a scrutiny committee is required for a cabinet system but not for a committee system (although some councils with committee systems choose to have them).

Group	Role	Responsibility
<b>Councillors</b>		
Full council	Strategic role in setting vision and direction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• approves the overall priorities and budget for the council</li> </ul>
Leader of the council / mayor	Strategic role in setting vision and direction of the council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• leads the work of the cabinet, its programmes, and priorities</li> <li>• has overall responsibility for the development, implementation, monitoring and review of the council's vision and corporate objectives</li> </ul>
Cabinet members (under the cabinet system)	Each member of the cabinet has a specific area of responsibility (also known as a portfolio).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• shares the collective responsibility for decisions taken by the cabinet</li> <li>• each cabinet member works with councillors and officers to make sure that the overview and scrutiny process works correctly</li> </ul>
Portfolio-holder (under the cabinet system)	<p>Each member of the cabinet has responsibility for a particular portfolio / area of service.</p> <p>Under the committee system, the council may appoint 'lead members' to carry out similar duties, though they will have no formal powers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• liaises closely with directors or heads of service responsible for activities within the portfolio</li> <li>• works closely with other members who will support the portfolio</li> <li>• presents reports to the cabinet, attendance at overview and scrutiny committees</li> <li>• usually holds the power to make certain decisions</li> </ul>



Group	Role	Responsibility
Committee members (under the committee system)	Under the committee system, has responsibility for making decisions, and overseeing delivery and performance, within a given service/subject area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• takes reports on matters (under the committee system)</li> <li>• contributes to developing policy on those matters</li> <li>• takes the final decision</li> </ul>
Scrutiny member	Contributing to policy development, holding the executive / decision-makers to account, investigating issues of importance to the wider area and overseeing delivery.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• discusses information they have received and hears evidence from councillors, officers, experts, and members of the public</li> <li>• the scrutiny committee makes recommendations for improvement to the cabinet, to other committees, to the council – or to local partners</li> </ul>
All councillors	Keeps a watching brief of the council's overall performance position, particularly areas of poorer performance and risk as well as areas of good practice and innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides challenges on performance issues.</li> <li>• Uses the information received through surgeries and queries from members of the public when considering performance.</li> </ul>
<b>Officers</b>		
Chief executive, strategic directors and directors	Leads the delivery of council services, following the direction of decision-making councillors. Ensures action is being taken to deal with areas of poorer performance and risk as well as developing areas of best practice and innovation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• takes action to deal with areas of poorer performance or refers them to the corporate management team or the council as appropriate</li> <li>• makes decisions, where permitted to do so under the council's scheme of delegation</li> </ul>

Group	Role	Responsibility
Corporate management team	<p>Manages performance and sets out what the council wants to achieve</p> <p>Works closely with councillors to translate the strategic direction of the administration into reality – but with a responsibility to support and advise all councillors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• challenges areas to improve and identifies areas of risk</li> <li>• implements strategic decisions and shares good practice</li> <li>• sets the culture and practices of the authority’s officers and leads on the development of the organisation’s capabilities and capacity</li> </ul>
Heads of service	Responsible for the leadership, management, and performance of key council services and working with councillors to ensure the delivery of the council’s vision, approach and policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is accountable for their service’s operational performance</li> <li>• develops colleagues and teams to ensure they deliver their objectives and contribute to the council’s strategic objectives</li> </ul>
Senior managers	Leads council services and takes the lead on continuous improvement, reporting performance to the public and corporately	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• carries out self-evaluation of strengths, areas for improvement, outstanding risks and how these are being dealt with</li> </ul>
Service / team managers	Reinforces the links between organisational and individual objectives and provides feedback that motivates employees, helping them to improve and holding them to account	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• helps team members understand the organisation’s performance management framework and how their role contributes to the achievement of council priorities</li> </ul>
Frontline teams / staff	<p>delivers services to service users</p> <p>holds first-hand knowledge of what is working and what isn’t</p> <p>routinely feeds back this information</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• holds knowledge of local communities and their specific needs</li> <li>• holds knowledge and skills to contribute to making services more valuable</li> </ul>

## Involving, enthusing, and supporting councillors

A key part of the officer role is to involve and support councillors, including backbenchers or those who are not part of key committees.

People who take on the role of councillor come from varying backgrounds and may have vastly different experiences and skills. For instance, some councillors may require more support with areas of performance management and measurements such as interpreting data or understanding statistics. While councillors in this position should be encouraged to access support and training courses, officers must also present their work as engagingly and accessibly as possible (see Section 8).



### **Challenge: supporting councillors effectively**

Are there any training and development areas you think are particularly important for your local councillors? How can councillors be supported to engage with these?

**Asking good quality questions.** Councillors must be equipped to provide effective scrutiny and understand performance information so that they can challenge constructively.

**Data and IT literacy skills.** Councillors may have had limited opportunity to practice these key skills issues before taking on the role.

**Understanding the concepts of activities, outputs, impacts and outcomes.** This will enable better engagement with the processes and a bigger picture approach to performance management.

## Building strong working relationships

Workshop participants emphasised the importance of strong working relationships between officers and councillors as crucial to effective performance management. People should feel able and confident to work together to achieve their shared goal of improving services for their citizens, and things run much more smoothly when councillors and officers work together to gain insight or understanding around particular aspects of performance management.

**‘We have a good interface between officers and members...we have an informal (private) cabinet meeting, brief them...these can be very engaged, good discussions. There’s much more useful dialogue now. We can see if there is anything further that can be done before things are made public...usually that’s around looking for solutions to the issues being raised.’**

Workshop participant

This culture needs to be actively encouraged at all levels of the organisation. Conflict, distrust and poor information flow between councillors and officers are often indicative of problems in a local authority. A more formal approach to collaborative working, such as introducing workshops, may facilitate good working relationships.



### **Case study: using workshops to develop a shared understanding**

The Highland Council took a workshop-based approach to refocus on understanding improvement and outcomes. They ran a series of workshops to ensure measures were understood by councillors, presenting trends in data, benchmarking, and agreeing on realistic stretch targets for the corporate plan. These workshops were run by service lead officers and were effective councillor/officer engagement. They helped develop a shared understanding of performance and the councillor's role in scrutiny and challenge. The result was an updated Corporate Plan which focused on improving the Council's national benchmark positions and outcomes for citizens.

The development and presentation of data for the workshops also led to improvements in public performance reporting using trends, targets, benchmarking, and infographics. For example, The Highland Council's key performance indicators 2019/20 performance report is presented in a clear, colour-coded, accessible way.

A requirement for this type of collaborative working can be written into a performance management framework, as in the below examples which emphasise the importance of strong working relationships:



### **Case study: Working collaboratively to create reports and gather feedback**

A joint effort approach to creating reports is included as part of Mendip District Council's performance management framework. Senior management and officers at all levels work collaboratively to gather information for reports that will be engaging for councillors and the public.

A close working relationship with the portfolio holder for each area of performance and building rapport with officers was emphasised as key in producing an informative report:

**'It is not just about requesting information; it is a two-way conversation.'**

Mendip District Council officer

This allows a greater understanding of the information and the process required to collate the report, which makes it more easily presented to Cabinet members. Constructive feedback at meetings is also encouraged to support learning and improvement both for services and for presenting reports.

Strong relationships across the council, however they are built, lead to high-quality work and a culture of collaboration and openness.



**Hints and tips: An Outlook group for performance management leads**

Richmond and Wandsworth Councils set up an Outlook group for performance leads. This allows the group to communicate easily about aspects of performance management, such as informing people of deadlines, and for people to liaise across departments if required.



**Hints and tips: Get people involved early**

There is a benefit to liaising with stakeholders at an early stage when developing systems, to ensure a full understanding of both what is wanted and what is possible to produce. For example, bringing information communications technology (ICT) and other staff together at the beginning of a project improves and develops the understanding of each other's work.

## Sharing information and learning

Learning from the experiences of others, and getting a sense of the barriers, direction changes, mistakes and strategy refinement can be extremely valuable for councils.<sup>5</sup> This is true both within councils (between councillors and officers) and between councils.



**Case study: Building networks within the council to share expertise**

A network of analysts from across one council meet regularly to share expertise, knowledge, and skillsets. These analysts benefit from seeing what others with similar capacities and resources are doing and from sharing ideas.

Officers should consider options for both formal (for example, see benchmarking and self-assessment) and informal (liaison and networking with equivalent officers in other local authorities) information sharing. This collaboration over both challenges and solutions identified will play an important role in raising standards across all councils.



### **Case study: Sharing information between councils**

Richmond Council and Wandsworth Council use an Open Council dataset where they openly share performance data and information as part of their shared staffing agreement (SSA), to share best practices and apply this to improve processes. They also use the Local Area Performance Solution (LAPS) tool which benchmarks common datasets across London councils (although this is currently under review by London Councils).

For sharing good practice among children's services in particular, London Innovation and Improvement Alliance (LIIA) is the Association of London Directors of Children's Services (ALDCS) sector-led improvement partnership and is hosted by London Councils. Its main purpose is to identify and share effective practice and encourage innovation.



### **Case study: Information sharing at Leeds City Council**

Leeds City Council has placed importance on sharing data widely through the use of their Data Mill North and on using this data to drive innovation. Data Mill North is an open data platform that allows statutory, third sector and private organisations within Leeds and in the North of England to publish up to 30 datasets for free.

The Council has a focus not only on publishing data to make it more widely available and encouraging others to do so, but on using this data to drive innovation. They hold Innovation Labs, events with various partners including software developers, staff, and members of the public, for which the Council sets a challenge that data could help them solve when published on Data Mill North.

For example, one challenge related to improving recycling. The Council waste service was supported to publish a dataset on bin collection routes for all of Leeds on Data Mill North. Developers were then able to access this publicly available dataset to create an app with live information about bin collection. Instead of using a static webpage that has to be manually updated with new information, app users can enter their postcode to find out information on bin collection in their area and can receive updates about this too (e.g. if recycling collection is updated to allow a new material).

Workshop participants regularly cited the value of peer review in helping to unlock new approaches or opportunities for their local citizens. This is a process commissioned by an authority and involves a small team spending time at the authority as peers to provide challenge and share learning.

**Useful link:**

The LGA offers a range of peer-led improvement support, including peer challenges which involve a team of experienced officers and members spending time with another council. Participating councils receive a comprehensive report and recommendations from the peer team and identify their own action plan to respond.

The LGA also offers remote peer support to provide councils with support and challenge to address COVID-19 related issues and broader challenges.

**Guidance:**

Any activity which involves data sharing may require consultation with the council's Data Protection Officer and adherence to the requirements and spirit of the Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

# 4. Developing an approach which enables improvement

Councils have different approaches to performance management. These may include using annual internal audits and annual scrutiny plans, for example, and may fall under transformation and improvement plans, self-assessment plans, council redesign, and so on.

## The role of scrutiny

Councillors and officers may be asked to provide feedback to the scrutiny committee on matters they wish to be considered for review. Approaches to this may be very diverse. However, regardless of structure, the key principles of scrutiny are likely to remain unchanged. Usually, these will centre around:<sup>6</sup>

- **policy reviews:** when an issue is recognised because of changes to legislation or government guidance, or a policy is viewed as ineffective. This should be in line with corporate priorities
- **performance reviews:** when an issue is identified due to underperforming in a specific area
- **value for money reviews:** a focus on improving performance, reducing costs, improving customer satisfaction and achievement of corporate priorities and outcomes.

A key part of an officer's role is to support councillors in effectively scrutinising policies, service delivery and proposals. This requires challenge and can involve councillors requiring detailed explanations. In some cases, approaches to scrutiny can unintentionally put the culture of openness, curiosity, and inquiry at risk. This is especially true at times when political considerations are heightened. There are no simple solutions to this challenge but ensuring a collaborative and respectful focus on agreed goals and outcomes will form the basis of risk mitigation.



### Hints and tips: Pre-scrutiny meetings with councillors

Officers who attended our workshops highlighted the value of holding informal pre-scrutiny discussions with councillors. This ensures councillors have the opportunity to clarify and understand issues in advance and consider areas to scrutinise. It also enables officers to give input, for example by suggesting areas to focus on and supporting councillors' understanding.





### **Guidance: Scrutiny**

Guidance from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (formerly the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government) sets out approaches that should enable scrutiny to flourish.

It explains that the purpose of Overview and Scrutiny Committees (introduced in 2000) is “to ensure that members of an authority who were not part of the executive could hold the executive to account for the decisions and actions that affect their communities”.

This guidance explains that this scrutiny should:

- provide constructive ‘critical friend’ challenge
- amplify the voices and concerns of the public
- be led by independent people who take responsibility for their role
- drive improvement in public services.

Scrutiny processes should be based on a collaborative and positive approach to challenge and improvement. This is not always easy to achieve, but it is likely to be essential to ensure that really good quality performance management is in place. Council leaders, councillors and officers should be focusing on trying to generate this type of challenging and positive culture. Those who are struggling to promote this approach must be supported to understand and engage with it more effectively.

Building strong working relationships, partnership working, and collaboration are likely to be key here.



### **Useful links: LGA workbook on scrutiny**

The LGA provides a [workbook on scrutiny](#) that, whilst aimed as a learning aid for councillors, outlines the process of scrutiny in councils, and the importance of officers in this process.



### **Case study: Challenging targets**

At High Peak Borough Council, members of the corporate select committee play an active role in challenging the targets proposed through an annual performance framework sub-committee which examines each target in detail, in addition to the routine scrutiny process. This helps councillors to better understand the reasons behind the targets, the definition of metrics and any barriers to enhanced performance.



### **Case study: partnership working to ensure effective scrutiny**

Cheshire West and Chester Council developed a reporting framework and mechanisms for driving improvement. In this, scrutiny is asked to consider areas of underperformance for inclusion in their workplans, or as the focus of a 'scrutiny in a day' workshop.

These workshops bring together interested scrutiny members with data and key officers to better understand current performance and improvement activity and make further recommendations.

## **Building on existing approaches**

Making meaningful improvements in performance management approaches requires a proper investment of time and resource. Against the backdrop of diminishing time and capacity of staff, performance management can often be perceived as a low priority especially when having to balance it against more imminent duties.

In almost all cases, a performance management approach will already exist in your council, and there is a strong case for building on existing approaches (rather than starting afresh):

- Building upon and adapting the current approach is likely to ensure a higher level of commitment and collaboration than attempting to impose a wholly new structure from scratch.
- There is a need for consistent use of data, as whenever a change is made to a performance management approach, the ability to view historic trends is reduced. The risk of losing historic comparisons must be weighed carefully with the benefits which should arise from the new approach. In some cases, it can be valuable to run both processes in parallel for a short period of time.

There is, of course, a cost to collecting data. If councils are already collecting and reporting on measures, these should be taken as starting points for developing a performance management framework. This is particularly the case if measures are used consistently nationally, so benchmarking can be used. If indicators are local, it is also essential to have a record of how indicators are collected and calculated, so there is an audit trail.



### **Challenges of lacking time and resource: data quality**

A central challenge a lack of time and resource results in is poor data quality. Decision-makers are often presented with partial, incomplete, or inconsistent data which doesn't allow for proper considerations of the risks, learning and opportunities.

It is therefore crucial that those involved in the collection, collation and reporting of performance data ensure that the data can be relied on. This should be seen as a legitimate and important activity. Officers should be open to responding to challenge from councillors regarding the quality of the data they are providing.<sup>7</sup>



### **Useful link:**

The LGA provides a self-assessment 'Data Maturity' tool allowing you to make an honest assessment of how advanced your organisation is at dealing with data. In this tool, you can compare your assessment with others from your organisation, and from around the country.

It is hoped this tool will stimulate discussion, give ideas on how you might improve and provides pointers to useful case studies and resources that will help.



### **Guidance: approaches to data**

Guidance from [Nesta \(2016\)](#) and the [LGA](#) provide a useful matrix of what good practice looks like in data management, data use, and data skills/ capabilities. This is a useful resource to see where your organisation is operating, and what you should be aiming for.

# 5. Developing a performance management framework

When developing or reviewing the performance management approach, officers must be clear about what they need to know. This is likely to involve considering others' priorities (and liaising with other colleagues within the council, other local partners, or national stakeholders), and understanding how the council will respond to or influence these priorities. This collaborative task is likely to be most effective if it takes place alongside a cyclical strategic planning process. Among other benefits, aligning to cyclical strategic planning should ensure that the performance management framework is based on a strong evidence base and is a continual process.



## **Tip: The performance management framework needs to be regularly updated**

Time should be allocated to encourage staff to periodically review and update their organisational objectives, priorities, and measures. These strategies must then be translated into operational activities, based on the performance information.<sup>8</sup>

## Linking to strategy and the council plan

When identifying performance measures, it is vital to link strategically to the council's overall aims and intended outcomes. This will mean linking these measures to the corporate plan and understanding how they fit into the broader vision of the council.



## **Case study: thinking strategically about outcomes**

Bristol City Council has been working on developing an organisational appreciation of data, insight, and performance outcomes. They noted that historically, managers have tended to focus on the performance of their own directorate or sphere of influence and give less consideration to the effect or impact across the council as a whole.

To address this, the council has invested in an insights programme, encouraging directorates to consider how their activity is linked to performance improvement, outcomes, and changes across the council. This approach has led to more focussed, mature discussions around performance, looking at what the data is showing and why, and considering what action or activity will be taken as a result.

The aim is to use data to show what is happening within the whole system, and for staff to think on a broader scale than individual, specific data items.

In today's climate of low budgets, this will mean prioritising services and reporting carefully to align with strategic priorities. For performance management purposes, as with the Bristol City Council example above, this may mean working to draw together insights from across the council into one report. This may allow more focused discussions into the big issues facing the council, how services may be impacting each other, and the factors influencing this.

To ensure a council is achieving its core purpose, officers and councillors must have insight into two fundamental issues:

- Have those aspects of people's lives which the council influences improved?
- Has there been an overall improvement in the quality of life for people who live in the area?

This is linked to the challenge of effective, measurable outcomes. These can be relatively straightforward to set; the challenge is to connect these to appropriate measures and targets. Effective performance management enables an understanding of these key questions.

## What gets measured gets done (and the problems this creates)

Performance management is often encouraged on the basis that what gets measured gets done. And there's certainly a value in this. The knowledge that activities are being measured and scrutinised is a key factor in ensuring progress.

However, this well-known phrase actually misquotes Peter Drucker's original statement, which provides a note of caution regarding a narrow focus on traditional targets:

**'What gets measured gets managed – even when it's pointless to measure and manage it, and even if it harms the purpose of the organisation to do so.'**<sup>9</sup>

When time and resources are limited, there can be a bias towards measuring performance in terms of easily quantifiable measures (often economy and efficiency), as these offer quick and cheap measurement methods. However, others that are harder to measure and evidence, such as equity, are often neglected and valuable elements of performance measurement are missed.<sup>10</sup>

It is therefore important to ensure performance management has a wide **focus on improvement**, rather than the narrow delivery of targets.



### **Challenge: Potential problems with targets<sup>11</sup>**

Here are some examples of problems that can occur when performance measurement focuses too closely on target delivery:

**Statistics can be manipulated:** data can be presented in ways that mislead the true picture, so targets appear to be reached despite the reality being less positive. For example, police crime statistics both in the UK and the US have been criticised in the past for changes to the way crimes were recorded and labelled. The changes resulted in lower figures and suggested there had been a reduction in crime.<sup>12</sup>

**Narrowing focus:** targets can result in people concentrating on doing what achieves the target, rather than doing the right thing for the customer or citizen. For example, a council was concerned to ensure that local people awaiting accommodation were able to move into a home as soon as it became available. They, therefore, created a measure designed to focus on increasing the speed of “turnarounds” between tenants. However, this overlooked the fact that the end of a tenancy provides an important (and rare) opportunity for the council to improve or maintain the home ready for future tenants. In many cases, the better outcome may have been to delay the new tenants for a few days, while important improvements took place. A measure that focused on speed of turnaround and the condition of the home for the new tenant may help to generate more effective outcomes.

**Cherry-picking to prioritise easy wins:** people may prioritise work that will help reach targets and avoid types that will negatively impact on targets. For example, in a housing repair service, tradespeople were set targets for how many jobs to get through in a day. If a job looked like it would take a long time and risk not achieving the daily target, they were known to silently put a ‘sorry we missed you’ card through the letterbox rather than delivering the required work.

**Working to deadlines:** For example, when applying for planning permission, a local council is required (by means of a government target) to meet within 8 weeks to decide an individual’s application. One council found that the large majority of applications were decided in week 7 or 8 – just before the deadline. With a little re-organisation, it might be possible to decide the applications much sooner. However, as long as the target is being met, the performance data is unlikely to highlight this potential for service improvement. In addition, this council was defaulting to refusing applications if they were marginal cases and the deadline was approaching, as they had left it too late to investigate these properly. This was worse for the applicant, who suffered delay, costs, and frustration, and for the council, which in turn incurred additional costs either defending planning appeals or processing a second planning application.

**Demotivation of skilled staff:** targets can reduce the ability of staff to use their professional judgment. The intention of setting a target is of course to align the priorities of staff with those of policy makers. However, it can be demotivating for well-trained and skilled staff to feel unable to use their own judgment about how best to achieve good work.

## Systems and tools to support performance management

Balanced Scorecard and Theory of Change are two well-regarded frameworks by which to organise performance measures. They are valuable as either tools to use and apply in their entirety or as an aid to help generate effective ideas and approaches to improving existing performance management approaches.



### Guidance: Balanced scorecards<sup>13</sup>

Existing literature commends the use of Balanced Scorecards<sup>14</sup> as a robust and rounded approach to performance management. Used well, this approach can provide succinct and reliable insight into all aspects of a local authority's activities and performance.

Scorecards link the organisations strategic aims and operational elements, encompassing both financial and non-financial measures. They are organised under the following four headings:

**Business process perspective.** Are the processes within the organisation working well? Is the organisation delivering what it needs to?

**Financial perspective.** Is the organisation operating efficiently and within budget?

**Learning perspective.** Does the organisation develop its staff and take on board developments in technology?

**Citizen perspective.** How do the organisation's customers perceive it? Is the organisation satisfying its main customers?





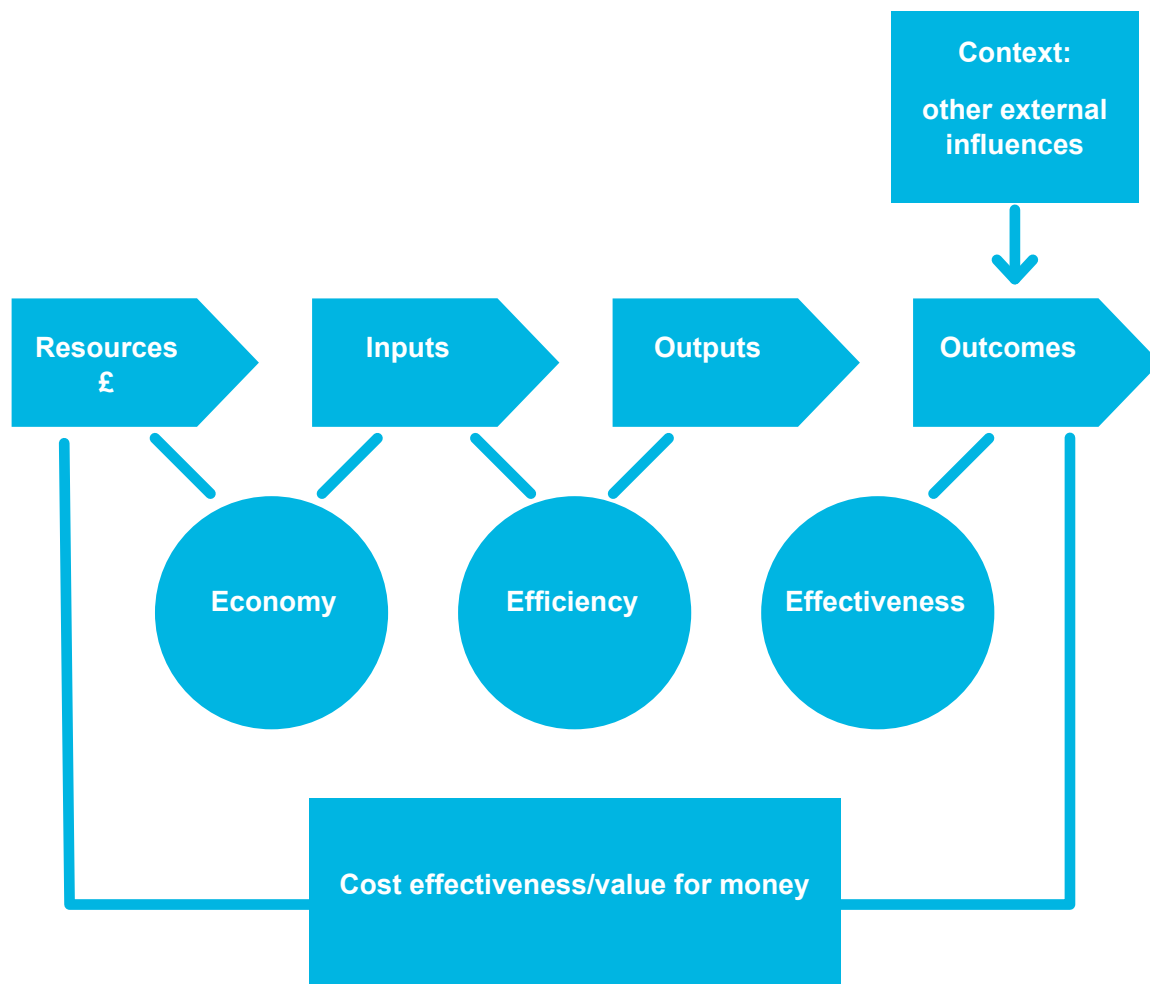


### Guidance: Theory of change model

A 'story of change' or a 'theory of change' model is used to determine relationships between local authorities' inputs and resources and their outputs and outcomes. It is usually framed in terms of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness.

The logical flow of the model offers insight into why performance is at its current level. It sets out a framework which organisations can use to examine how programmes or interventions were implemented. It can also help identify flaws in the management of resources, inputs, or outputs, in cases where anticipated costs, effects and benefits did not occur.

The diagram puts performance into context with the story of change model. The narrative is from left to right, to show the resource and inputs going into the programme, through to the outputs and outcomes achieved.<sup>15, 16</sup>



This approach is very closely related to logic models which are routinely used to better understand public sector projects and proposals. Below is an example of a logic model.<sup>17</sup>

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impact
If this...			Then that...	
The resources (staff, time, money) being put into an intervention	The things that will be done with these resources	A count of the 'products' which result from these activities	The immediate consequences and change for the participants. There are usually four key areas of change for the participants: 1. knowlege 2. skills 3. attitudes 4. behaviours	The higher level and usually longer-term results in participants' lives, which the service may contribute towards, but which go beyond the direct and immediate change.
Example				
£85,000 for 12 months.  Two FTE support workers, plus managment oversight and overheads.	Intensive support sessions with care leavers to support an 'into employment and training' scheme for care leavers.  Activities will include:  brokering placements; employer and workplace mentor liaison; identifying training opportunities; pre-placement preparation and upskilling care leavers to enter the workplace or join training programmes; mentoring; pathway into permanent employment planning with care leaver	Minimum of 150 support sessions delivered each month.  Minimum of eight care leavers actively engaged in the programme at any time.	<b>Care leavers have:</b>  Improved knowledge of support options available.  Skills to engage in a workforce; understand the importance of reliability, punctuality, working as a team, reponsibility and duties; understanding payslips, tax and NI or other employment conditions.  Improved confidence about future employability and a realistic appreciation of how to gain and keep a job; interview skills.	<b>Care leavers:</b>  Are work-ready; have acquired a range of employment skills and have a basis of a marketable CV.  Are better equipped to sustain themselves financially, enjoy the benefits of being in work and participate in society by making a contribution to productive and/or socially beneficial activity.  Are less likely to be NEET (not in employment. education or training).  Are better able to keep affordable, idependent accomodation.  Have a reduced reliance on social care services.

## Allowing for nuance and continual improvement

It is important to allow for nuance in performance management, and especially during times of crisis. This is not always allowed by traditional methods of performance management such as RAG (red-amber-green) ratings (see next section). For example, various aspects of council performance are likely to have looked very different in March 2020 in comparison with the previous year, as the country responded to the first lockdown.



### **Case study: Using targets differently during the early stages of the pandemic**

Cheshire West and Chester adopted their new performance management framework at the same time as the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Due to this, for the first year, performance was not judged as red-amber-green, despite agreed targets being set out within the report. This meant that a measure such as the number of businesses being offered support by the council was not presented as 'green' as it had increased significantly, but couched instead in terms of the positive response being made to a crisis in the local economy.

## RAG (red, amber, green) ratings

RAG ratings are frequently used in performance management. Many participants in workshops stated that leaders feel reassured by RAG ratings, as they are easy to present and engage with, and allow issues to be highlighted swiftly. However, RAG ratings should be used with caution, as they can also hide the nuances of performance and in some cases, hinder progress:



### **Case study: The challenge of RAG ratings**

One workshop participant described an example of a council where several indicators were "green" in their RAG rating and therefore not subject to detailed scrutiny. A benchmarking and peer review exercise highlighted that, in fact, this council was performing poorly in comparison to its peers against these measures. This new knowledge enabled constructive dialogue within the council, challenging themselves to improve even those measures which were being rated as green.

RAG ratings can be useful, but targets should be regularly reviewed so that they reflect trends and benchmarked information. In fact, there is some indication that councils are now more likely to use direction of travel and incremental improvement against benchmarks rather than relying on RAG ratings alone. This is likely to generate the type of "continual" improvement which will enable really effective changes to be generated within a local area. Self-assessment and benchmarking against useful comparisons are two ways in which to do this, which are discussed in this section.

# Self-assessment

Self-assessments allow organisations to challenge existing performance, and to identify strengths, spot gaps and areas for improvement to inform planning.



## Useful links: self-assessment

The LGA offers a variety of tools which can be used for self-assessment:

- a [self-assessment toolkit](#) for adult social care that supports councils in making the best use of their resources. It is based on the six domains of the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) framework, which each encompass a number of performance areas. Here, organisations are encouraged to assess themselves against the score matrix and to record the evidence they have to support the score.
- a self-assessment '[Data Maturity](#)' tool allows individuals to make an honest assessment of how advanced their organisation is at dealing with data. In this tool, assessments can be made with others from the organisation, and from around the country.
- a [Transformation and Innovation Exchange](#) that has an online self-assessment tool which helps councils identify their current capabilities and consider improvement opportunities and useful support.

The [Public Service Improvement Framework \(PSIF\)](#) is used in Scotland and is a self-assessment approach to support improvement in organisations. This uses a framework of statements to assess performance against expectations and across particular themes.

Some stakeholders emphasised frameworks such as the '[Plan, Do, Study, Act](#)' (PDSA) to test improvement. Here, local areas can test changes on a small scale, integrating learning in a structured way before larger-scale implementations. It gives room for learning from ideas and examining which initiatives do and don't work. This framework aims to answer three key questions:

- 1) what are we trying to accomplish?
- 2) What measures of success will we use?
- 3) What changes can we make that will result in improvement?

# Benchmarking

Benchmarking plays an important role for councils to provide a broader understanding of their position in the wider environment. It allows local authorities to identify their strengths and allows for a continuous review of progress in target areas. It is therefore often a key part of performance management frameworks.



## Case study: Benchmarking

For High Peak Borough Council and Staffordshire Moorlands District Council, benchmarking is embedded in their performance framework and annual reports. The councils participate in near neighbour benchmarking groups and also subscribe to place analytics platforms which provide databases with insights into the characteristics of the local area and the levers that fundamentally affect it. They use measures such as an annual value for money analysis, to ascertain the council(s) relative position both regionally and nationally.



**Tip:** when comparing with other authorities, aim to use relevant and realistic measures and to benchmark against authorities with a similar demographic. This will likely involve looking at both statistical and geographic 'near-neighbours'.

Benchmarking is especially valuable in encouraging openness and transparency between local authority areas, sharing best practise, learning from experiences, and sharing solutions between organisations which can be used to drive improvements in performance (see 4.3.4 Sharing information and learning ).



## Useful links: Benchmarking

[LG Inform](#) is a free online data tool from the LGA which brings together a range of key performance data for authorities, alongside contextual and financial information, and allows your authority area to be compared with others. The tool allows users to access, compare and analyse data, and present their findings online or offline.

Alongside this, [LG Inform](#) manages a 'benchmarking club' that is free to all councils. This allows local authorities the ability to submit their data and then compare it with others who have also submitted data.

[LG Inform Plus](#) allows you to look within your own authority area and provides information for each ward and smaller areas of geography (rather than comparing your authority area with other authorities, as for [LG Inform](#)). Being able to

compare between wards allows you to target areas for resources or performance improvements.

LG Inform Value for Money Profiles bring together data about the costs, performance and activity of local councils and fire and rescue authorities.

The Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) is a high-level benchmarking tool which brings together a wide range of information about how all Scottish councils perform in delivering services to local communities. It is designed to help senior management teams and elected members to ask questions about key council services. It allows councils to examine why variations in cost and performance occur between similar councils.

The Local Authority Interactive Tool (LAIT) draws together key public data concerning children's services and can be used for numerous purposes, including benchmarking among councils.



### **Case study: Using LG Inform Plus to enrich and present data**

Coventry City Council uses LG Inform Plus to benchmark their activity and metrics in comparison to other authorities. They used these comparators to produce the One Coventry Plan and the Coventry City Annual Performance Report. More recently LG Inform Plus has allowed them to respond to fresh issues and to enrich the data they hold about local people and places within a Citywide Intelligence Hub.

Previously the authority collected this information in a large 100-page data book that few people would read. More quantitative data intelligence was needed to show what different parts of the city actually felt like. LG Inform Plus allowed them to bring together a range of information to produce shorter profiles about different parts of the city in a more user-friendly way. Previously, to find this data the authority would have visited multiple individual sources. LG Inform Plus enables single data feeds (APIs) to pull this data together in a format that they can use in their own internal data hub. This saves the authority time and resource.

The profiles enable them to show what different parts of the city look like when they talk to residents, informing them about their local area and supporting work towards improving areas of the city. Colleagues in social care and heads of service at the council have also used the outputs from LG Inform Plus via the joint strategic needs assessments that the product allowed them to create.

# 6. Creating performance measures

## Generating the theme and indicators

The following themes can be a useful starting point for ensuring that the right performance management and KPI information is being captured and presented to councillors.<sup>18</sup>

Theme	Key questions
<b>Economy</b>	What are the costs of the service?
<b>Efficiency</b>	What is the ratio of outputs to resource inputs?
<b>Quality</b>	Is the service achieving quality standards and customer satisfaction?
<b>Effectiveness</b>	Do actual outputs and outcomes achieve our intended objectives?
<b>Impact</b>	What net improvements does the service make to the quality of life of the local community?
<b>Equity</b>	Is the service's distribution of outputs, outcomes, benefits, and impacts distributed equitably among different groups (e.g., socioeconomic status, gender, race, etc.)?

Turning these themes into effective measures is key to effective performance management. As a general rule, these measures should be:

- Limited in number
- Comparable over time and to other organisations if possible
- Linked to actions, vision, and strategy
- Targeted to be at different levels of the organisation.
- Informed by government priorities, local partners' views.

The indicator should normally comprise three elements: the measure, the comparator, the target. The table gives more information about these three core elements:

Element of a performance indicator	Description
<b>The measure</b>	This is the feature that requires investigation and may be part of the input, process, output or outcome.
<b>The comparator</b>	This is the benchmark or yardstick on which the performance will be compared – this is how you will measure progress
<b>The target</b>	This is the level of achievement expected over the period being reviewed – what you are aiming for.

In some instances, the comparator and target may be combined. For example, this could be the case when the target is to improve the ranking position of the indicator which is being benchmarked.



**Tip: Follow SMART or FABRIC acronyms in developing effective indicators**

### SMART

- **Specific:** The performance measure indicates exactly what result is expected so that performance can be judged accurately
- **Measurable:** Data is available or is collected relatively easily
- **Achievable:** The measure is realistic, not based on aspiration
- **Relevant:** The measure matters to the intended audience and is clearly related to the service being measured
- **Timely:** Information is available frequently enough to have value in making decisions, and information is provided to managers and policymakers at times they need it



## FABRIC:

- **Focused:** Focused on the organisation's aims and objectives
- **Appropriate:** Appropriate to, and useful for, the stakeholders who are likely to use it
- **Balanced:** Giving a picture of what the organisation is doing, covering all significant areas of work
- **Robust:** Robust to withstand organisational changes or individuals leaving
- **Integrated:** Integrated into the organisation, being part of the business planning and management processes
- **Cost-effective:** Balancing the benefits of the information against the costs of collecting evidence



### Case study: Aligning targets with broader national and global goals

North Kesteven District Council created a Community Strategy focusing on the next 10 years, which involved re-aligning and formalising all their work through to 2030 with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. As part of this process, they created a Performance Framework utilising a suite of datasets to measure performance. The datasets linked back to the council's STEEPLED (Social, Technological, Economic, Environmental, Political, Legislative, Ethical, Demographics) process, which includes an ongoing assessment of the district (including comparisons) being made against these eight elements.

## Common sources of performance information

When thinking about developing a set of performance indicators in your authority, you should start by reviewing what is already available. Whilst you may later decide to collect some bespoke data, there may already be data published by services in a range of different places.

Below, we have listed common examples of places where performance data may already be published. It is also important to consider collecting evidence from all stages of service delivery, including planning, specification, execution, and independent post-implementation reviews.<sup>21</sup>

Whichever evidence sources are chosen, they should be used robustly, triangulating against other sources where possible, to offer meaningful insight about progress. The table below gives some examples of documents that can be used to provide evidence

Evidence	Comments
<b>Performance, finance, and risk</b>	
Annual performance reports	The council publishes an annual report which provides information on priorities, budget, corporate plan delivery, overall performance, key achievements, and service improvements.
Quarterly performance reports	Departments of the council and their partners will usually produce quarterly scorecards and reports which will provide a snapshot of current performance.
Quarterly finance figures	This explains how the council is spending according to projections. It indicates unexpected expenditure and issues which may lead to overspends and underspends at the end of the year.
Programme and project management information	The council will have a 'corporate plan' which members can look at to establish whether major strategies and policies are being implemented on time.
Risk registers	What risks are in the implementation of major policies and the delivery of day-to-day services? Indicates the impacts of risks that are likely to occur and what steps can be taken to mitigate them.
Complaints information	Look at major themes and issues of complaints. This gives an idea of where problems may lie and can act as the basis for more detailed scrutiny work.
Internal reviews and action plans	Internal reviews may be carried out by the council's own officers or by external consultants. Scrutiny should be placed on relevant documentation.
Information from benchmarking clubs	Many councils voluntarily share performance information with others to help improvement and mutual learning.

<b>Strategic Information</b>	
The budget and policy framework	
External inspection reports	
Corporate peer challenge letter, reports, and information	
Departmental plans and strategies	
Partnership plans and strategies	
Council or partnership programmes	These sit beneath strategic plans, departmental (or corporate) programmes and monitor how individual projects are implemented. Looking at programmes can be used to compare plans against delivery in the context of performance information
Cross-departmental strategies	
Improvement plans	
<b>Other information</b>	
Feedback from consultations/ resident panels	This can take a range of forms, including bespoke consultation exercises, brief “how did we do?” surveys and reviews of existing case file/complaints/ compliments data to help ensure resident perspectives are properly understood.
Feedback from frontline staff	There will be formal or informal ways for middle and senior managers to get feedback from frontline staff. This is valuable for scrutiny.

# 7. Getting and using the right data

## Gathering evidence and using existing data

The phrase ‘drowning in data, whilst thirsting for information’<sup>23</sup> may feel familiar for some council officers. Feedback from participants at the workshops highlighted the amount of useful data which is already captured by local authorities, but which is not always processed or analysed in a way that informs effective performance management.

Overall, there is substantial scope for many councils to further exploit their existing information and develop their members’ analytical abilities through training and development.

As discussed above, the heart of a good performance management framework is likely to comprise a set of KPIs which enable strategic leaders to have a direct line of sight to the activities which are underway. However, good quality evidence comes in many forms, and quantitative KPI metrics are just one part of a wider picture:<sup>24</sup>



Useful insight for performance management can be gathered in the form of numbers, stories, lived experience, academic literature, digital media, personal knowledge, or perspectives and much more. All of these varied pieces of evidence have an important role to play in informing policy, practice, and improvement.

## Using both qualitative and quantitative data

It can be helpful to think about these types of evidence in two forms: numerical (or quantitative data) and stories or insight (qualitative data). This provides a useful way to begin considering performance management approaches which may extend beyond KPIs.

Overall, there is merit in gathering in-depth qualitative insight from citizens, alongside more standardised KPI data, as it signals an open and engaged approach which is likely to result in solutions more effectively co-produced with citizens. However, as with numerical metrics, councillors and officers must understand the context behind qualitative sentiments, to gain the best understanding of the data.

Considerations	Quantitative data	Qualitative data
<p><b>Type of questions which can be commonly addressed</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How many people are in this situation/ are affected by this problem/ have been helped by this initiative?</li> <li>• How prevalent is this issue?</li> <li>• Which groups are most affected by these issues or are at most risk?</li> <li>• How much of a difference does the initiative/programme make to the prevalence of these problems?</li> <li>• How much does a service cost?</li> <li>• How long does it take to deliver this service?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why are people affected by this problem?</li> <li>• How do people end up in this situation?</li> <li>• How does this initiative / programme work? How does this impact people’s lives?</li> <li>• Why does it work / not work?</li> <li>• What do people think about something? How could it be improved? What elements are most valued? Why?</li> </ul>

<p><b>Key benefits</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Produces succinct data which is easy to compare.</li> <li>• Can measure the extent, prevalence, size and strength of observed characteristics, differences, and commonalities.</li> <li>• Can involve a large sample of people or observed phenomenon, which can often inform robust modelling or generalisations.</li> <li>• Can be used to benchmark against other councils, which is an important way to highlight areas for improvement and identify new opportunities for learning. Commonly used examples include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ tools created by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy e.g., Financial Resilience Index</li> <li>◦ national comparable data held by LG Inform e.g., benchmarking clubs</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enables richer understanding of key concepts including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• citizens’ experience of engaging with the council</li> <li>• citizens’ own insights about the extent to which the council has enabled improvements in their lives.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• priorities and issues which are important to the citizen, but which may not fall within an existing performance management framework.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Common drawbacks</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can lack nuance and may not include insights.</li> <li>• Can promote a focus on being “above average” rather than exploring underpinning issues</li> <li>• Can create perverse incentives among the workforce to meet a “target” rather than making the best quality choice.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engages a smaller sample of people or observed phenomenon so is less likely to be generalisable</li> <li>• Difficult to analyse and present succinctly alongside KPIs.</li> </ul>



### **Case study: the value of both qualitative and quantitative evidence**

Coventry City Council has adopted a mixed-methods approach to presenting performance information to councillors, citizens, partner organisations and other stakeholders.

The city's One Coventry approach shapes the way the Council works with its partners to improve the city and improve people's lives. At the heart of this approach is the One Coventry Plan, which sets out the vision and priorities, and the performance management framework, which sets out how progress towards this is monitored and reported.

The annual performance report outlines progress towards the One Coventry Plan. It is designed to provide a narrative setting out the wider social and economic context, the actions taken by the Council (as well as by partners and communities) to improve and change things, and the outcomes of that action, using a consistent set of performance metrics agreed with elected representatives to monitor progress and change.

The intention of bringing the narrative and indicators together is to recognise that numbers alone do not tell the full story – that the context in which they operate is just as important.



### **Useful link: Welsh Government guidance on using qualitative data:**

Performance frameworks often prioritise numerical metrics because it can be difficult to present qualitative data in a succinct and meaningful manner. However, guidance recently published by the Welsh Government concerning [understanding experiences and outcomes](#) shares some ideas about how qualitative data can be presented more systematically by using outcome-focused case studies, and results-based accountability approaches.

## Ensuring the citizen's perspective is included

Increasingly, councils are exploring new methods of gathering and using feedback from residents and the public to inform priorities for performance management. Workshop participants highlighted methods that are proving particularly helpful when trying to capture and distil the experience of citizens:

- **Benchmarking resident satisfaction data.** This LGA initiative provides a high quality ready to use question set for councils that are running resident surveys. It also allows councils to benchmark their results against national and regional comparison figures. This is valuable because (a) used effectively, benchmarking is a useful way to raise standards and encourage progress (b) annual repetition of measures enables councils to see whether there is a positive or negative trend in opinion.
- **Complaints, compliments, and correspondence from citizens.** Workshop participants highlighted the value of proactively seeking out this type of feedback and routinely analysing the themes that arise. This information can be succinctly presented to councillors in a narrative form to supplement KPI metrics and provide rich insight into the issues which are of most importance to citizens.
- **Tools to monitor citizen interactions digitally.** The following are examples of tools that can be used to evaluate the way citizens interact with council websites and digital services:
  - **CRM (customer relationship management) software.** This is a central place where organisations can store customer data, track interactions and share information with colleagues. They can be useful for councils, for example, to track interactions with citizens, or recognise citizens who have already contacted them and locate information relating to their enquiry.
  - **Google Analytics.** This web analytics service offered by Google tracks and reports website traffic. This can help identify trends and patterns in how visitors engage with websites, for example, to see at what point in a process customers are leaving a website or which pages are receiving the most interactions.
  - **Social media analytics data.** Social media analytics tools allow data to be collected, monitored and evaluated from social media sites. Google Analytics can be used for this purpose; other common tools include Sprout Social, HubSpot, Hootsuite and Buffer Analyze.
  - **GIS (geographic information system).** GIS is a data mapping system, which allows data to be managed, analysed, and mapped. This can help councils understand patterns and relationships within the data and how these link to geographic context.





### **Guidance: data sharing**

Many of these data sources raise questions concerning consent and data sharing. In co-opting these datasets to inform a performance management approach, it will be essential to ensure that the council's Caldicott Guardian is consulted (for health and social care data), and the relevant consent and data protection protocols are closely followed.



### **Useful link: new guidance from the Welsh Government on engaging with citizens**

Social services departments in Wales are now legally required to engage with citizens to understand their experiences and outcomes in more detail. The Welsh Government has recently published two pieces of guidance that inform this approach.<sup>25</sup> This guidance encourages authorities to step beyond the type of activities outlined above and engage more deeply with citizens to uncover their stories and ensure that this rich qualitative data supplements the KPI metrics which have more traditionally informed performance management approaches.

Officers should ensure that the data they present includes direct feedback from the Citizen which describes two things: (i) their experience of the service (e.g. were they treated well? would they recommend to friends and family?) and (ii) the difference which has been made to their lives as a result. While these questions can be answered via KPIs, there is an increasing recognition that quantitative metrics provide only partial information. While numerical data provides a snapshot of trends in outcomes, qualitative data, in stories and experiences, can contextualise quantitative data and help aid understandings of what works and why.

The case studies below illustrate some of the numerous initiatives councils have used to harness citizen data in the form of feedback:



### **Case study: Surveys and social media**

Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council has developed its own performance management framework and works closely with its staff to influence continuous improvement. The council circulates a monthly questionnaire which asks customers "how did we do?". The responses are fed back to staff who made decisions so they can see how their actions impact people's lives.

Planning managers review the monthly questionnaire responses on a quarterly basis. They interpret the general direction of travel of performance and pay particular attention to the impact that council decisions have made on people's

lives. These factors are shown to and discussed with all council staff in the planning department. Successes are celebrated and poor feedback – such as frustrations around access to officers, difficulty understanding the planning process – are discussed and contribute to future better ways of working.

The quarterly reports are shared wider within the council to appropriate staff and council members.

The Council also makes effective use of social media and has informative and humorous tweets describing its successes and failures, such as the below example.

This type of social media presence can help to raise the profile of the council and reach a wider audience, while the light-hearted tone can sit alongside more serious content to increase engagement.



### **Case study: Engaging with residents: Highland Council**

Highland Council conducts an annual performance and attitudes Survey of Citizens' Panel members which provides information on satisfaction with council services, qualities, and perceptions of community life in the Highlands.

The council also use social media to promote their short survey aiming to engage with 16-34-year-old residents to complement their annual performance and attitude survey, which typically receives a lower response from the 16-34 age group.

The survey asks questions such as expectations of the council, satisfaction with services, and involvement in decision making.

It is worth noting that when gathering citizen perspectives, or conducting bespoke data collection of any kind, there are several useful questions to consider when thinking about the number and type of participants. These include considerations such as representativeness, sample sizes, response rates, the distribution of citizen feedback being highly polarized, and clarity over statistically significant changes in performance rather than fluctuations. These must be understood so data can be interpreted appropriately.

In addition, we list below a number of resources which those involved in shaping this guide have highlighted as having a particular value in gathering data for performance management in councils.



### Useful links

[LG Inform](#) and [LG Inform Plus](#) bring together a range of key performance data, allowing you to compare your own authority with others within and outside of your own authority area. The tool allows registered users to access, compare and analyse data, and for local authorities to present their findings online or offline.

[Local Government Association](#) offers a range of support, advice and materials to assist councils in research activities, transparency and making better use of data.

[Data Cymru](#) offers a range of support to help you find and use data, including data collection, analysis, presentation, and training for local councils in Wales.

[NOMIS](#) is a service provided by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) that gives free access to detailed and up to date UK labour market statistics.

[CIPFA](#) (the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accounting) provides information on public finance. They provide advice, information and guidance, courses and conferences, property and asset management solutions, and consultancy for public sector clients.

[Making data count](#) are practical guides by NHS England on data, decision-making and analysis. It focuses on SPC (statistical process control), which is widely used in the NHS to understand whether change results in improvement.

The LGA provide a [resource](#) focused on gathering residents' views. It outlines the key questions that should be addressed before starting a residents' survey or consultation.

# 8. Analysing and presenting the data

## Approaches to analysis

Once the measures have been agreed, and the data gathered, officers will be responsible for analysing and presenting the data in a way that enables meaningful interrogation and discussion.



### Hints and tips: Approaches to analysis

The following questions are useful to consider when thinking about the analysis of data:

- What exactly does this data tell us? Does it help us answer our KPI or research question? (e.g., does it cover the appropriate time period? Does it cover the services and cohorts of people we are most interested to understand?)
- What are the limitations of the data? Is it likely to have over-or-under-represented certain views or experiences?
- What are the key messages that arise from the data about the KPI or research question?
- What are the common or majority view experiences? What are the outlying views?
- What are the views/ experiences of particular individuals/ groups?
- Are there any unanticipated messages or themes?
- Does the data prompt any further questions or lines of inquiry?
- Do I have any biases, perceptions or life experiences that could affect my analysis of the data?
- How will the resulting findings be used?

## Presenting the data

To ensure that evidence is used to inform improvement, data must be presented to the audience (whether councillors, senior leaders, or the public) in a useful format and in a timely manner. This is a vital way in which officers can contribute to effective performance management.

When data is presented clearly and accessibly, and in a way that includes context and detail, it can have a real impact on people's ability to usefully engage with it. Those engaged in the workshops which informed this guidance were keen to highlight the importance of enhancing data with context and insight:

**'There is a lack of delving into the data and asking the right questions. The information is there, but the commentary doesn't provide analysis.'**

Workshop participant

While councillors will be able to draw on their own insight, officers must recognise that it is unlikely that any one councillor will have context and insight over all the topics they are expected to oversee. Working in partnership with councillors to improve context and insight surrounding data being reviewed will ensure performance management works more effectively.



#### **Case study: More narrative and illustrative examples in member reports**

Based on member feedback, High Peak Borough Council and Staffordshire Moorlands District Council have recently moved towards a different reporting style for their public-facing member reports, including more narration, mini case studies, project updates and less statistical analysis and action planning (although these aspects remain active in the background). This new style also features the use of infographics to celebrate success and has been well received by members. The council continue to incorporate feedback to ensure that elected councillors have the information they require in a format suited to their needs.

## Principles of data presentation

The following are some aspects to bear in mind when presenting data, to make it as easy to engage with as possible.



#### **Hints and tips: data presentation**

**Keep it simple.** The information should be in an easy-to-read format, using jargon and acronym-free language.

**Include only relevant information,** limiting the number of indicators on any one report to ensure the document is clear and understandable for the reader. Consider using appendices of data to provide additional information if necessary.

**Consider the audience.** The information should be tailored to the audience and may look slightly different depending on who this is, e.g. a public-facing report versus a council report may require different levels of detail.

**Use data visualisation tools** to give meaning to the data. For instance:

- Quantitative data is typically presented as a series of graphs, tables, or infographics. This should be accompanied by a narrative explanation of the insights which the researcher feels should be highlighted and their relevance to the research question.
- Narrative data is typically presented in prose, stressing the key themes and their connections to the research question. It is valuable to include stories, examples, and quotes to demonstrate the key themes being emphasised.

**Include any relevant additional or contextual information** to make sense of the data. This could include providing simple annotations to point to relevant events which may have caused a change in data trends.

**Include benchmarking data where relevant**, to give a demonstration of how the council is performing in comparison to other similar authorities.

**Include limitations of the data** to avoid misinterpretation.

Ensure a focus on actions in the next steps. Recommendations should be evidence-based and ideally SMART or FABRIC.<sup>26</sup>



### Useful links

In practice, there are numerous ways to approach the task of presenting data effectively. Some suggestions are set out by the [Office for National Statistics](#) who provide useful guidance on presenting data, involving creating useful charts and tables.

The following case studies represent a few examples of approaches councils have taken to presenting their data in a more engaging format:



### Case study: Presenting performance data accessibly

Cheshire West and Chester's new approach to performance reporting has been well received by officers and members alike. It has led to slimmed-down reports, less repetition and greater visibility of performance trends and comparisons to benchmarks over time and has also helped direct more in-depth scrutiny of issues such as delayed transfers of care and homelessness.

Each indicator is presented on a tile which sets out the title, current performance, status, and a graph showing historic performance. An 'information' button on each tile opens additional information. This includes the rationale for choosing the measure, commentary on current performance, future targets, performance against available benchmarks and clear accountability. This enables a succinct picture

of performance to be presented, but also allows individuals to drill down into a significant amount of information if needed. Councillors have particularly welcomed the more visual approach.

Measure data and commentary is updated by officers from across the council via Microsoft SharePoint. This data is then imported into a live Power BI dashboard that is used for internal briefings before being published on the [council's website](#).



### **Case study: A new approach to presenting reports**

Mendip District Council changed the visual aspects of their performance report when their new administration were elected to make the performance information more accessible. The process involved creating a corporate plan with members and senior officers, then holding a workshop to understand the responsibility for each service area.

Marketing and media teams were engaged early, to provide an easy-to-read format both for the reader and for those collating information.

The report aims to provide sufficient detail while still being succinct enough to remain engaging and accessible. For example, RAG statuses indicate how the priority is performing overall. For those rated Red or Amber, context is provided about why this is the case. In cases where milestones are delayed for any reason, this is highlighted within the report too.

Members were involved with the report commentary from the outset, which enabled better engagement and focus on what was needed from the reports. This commentary is continuing to evolve, through learning and challenge from Scrutiny on detail.



### **Case study: Leadership team dashboard**

Rochdale Borough Council measure performance corporately through a leadership team dashboard, which now features a RAG rating system and a commentary. A series of KPIs are broken down into different directorates. Quarterly and annual indicators are provided, with those in red highlighted on the front page. Performance through each quarter can be viewed and an added commentary helps to provide context for the indicators.

The clearer visual presentation of performance data for the leadership team dashboard has helped to enhance understanding and has led to more focussed and frank leadership team meetings. Leadership discussion now focuses on the actual data and areas of concern, rather than highlighting difficulties navigating the layout of the document as was the case previously. Each directorate now takes ownership at the meeting and delivers their own section of the report.

## Tools and approaches to presenting data

Business intelligence software complements performance management by allowing organisations to collect and turn real-time data into meaningful information. Staff can access data using strategic dashboards and reports outlining trends of key performance indicators. The following are some common tools and approaches.

### **Power BI for internal briefings**

Those who attended the workshops which have informed this guidance consistently praised the reporting capabilities of Microsoft's Power BI to simplify data preparation, produce interactive data visuals, and interact with a wide range of datasets.

For example, Cheshire West and Chester's Insight and Intelligence team worked to create a visual, interactive [PowerBI dashboard](#) that is used for briefing members, senior officers and internal management meetings on performance. Visuals from the dashboard are reproduced within the static appendix within the joint Performance and Finance Committee Report.

### **A multi-layered offer: Power BI and GitHub**

Councils may wish to use tools in combination to provide a multi-layered offer for presenting data, which can appeal to different audiences who may need differing levels of information.

For example, Coventry City Council makes its performance report publicly accessible not only as a PDF report but also the Council's website. The consistent set of indicators is made available on an interactive Power BI dashboard, with underlying data published as open data on GitHub. This multi-layered approach ensures that the council provides a full stack of performance information. Those who want a narrative summary and overall red-amber-green ratings can rely on the performance report, but partner organisations and citizens who need full access to the underlying data can also access the data on GitHub (along with other council data).

### **Dynamic tools**

Other tools may be used instead of Power BI. For example, [Scottish local authorities](#) have a tool which councils link to from their performance pages.

At North Kesteven District Council, their performance software (CAMMS) has an external-facing dashboard to present performance data in a visual and accessible manner. This can be utilised by members of the public, officers, and elected members. The performance data for each corporate priority is presented in multiple ways to suit readers. For instance, highlighting whether an indicator is on or off track, and providing options to review the measures in more detail, such as graphs outlining trends over time.

Some councils also praised the use of Pentana which is an online performance and risk management system. It holds performance information and enables users



to view and update performance in one place and be able to monitor and manage performance on a wider scale. The system can also be linked to live reports held in alternative systems (Power BI, Microsoft Office, etc.).

Rochdale Borough Council noted that performance management has improved within the organisation since the new Pentana system was established, with some colleagues monitoring information, updating their own indicators, and creating their own dashboard reports.

## Understanding the support available

Training is often coordinated internally in councils via intranet pages, conversations with colleagues, and addressing issues on a case-by-case basis. For example, training may be provided on the use of tools such as Pentana, to explain the system, expectations and good practice. This flexible approach can be very effective, and we encourage councillors and officers to speak up and request support whenever they need it. Councils may also wish to provide a training course for councillors as part of a structured induction programme.

Officers must work with councillors and services to ensure that workshops and training sessions are put on at a time and place that is suitable for members, that content is suitable and covers members' needs, and that it allows members to feedback any questions or queries they may have in relation to performance management.



### **Case study: Supporting staff to improve their practical analytical skills**

Wandsworth and Richmond Councils are working with an external organisation to run a Data Science Apprenticeship for staff. This enables staff to pick up a range of data analytics skills and test these formally to achieve a qualification, demonstrating their commitment to being a local government leader in using data effectively and making it integral in what they do. Wandsworth and Richmond Councils also have an internal Learning and Development Hub where resources are added to help staff with their performance, analysis and project management tools.



### **Useful link**

The LGA run a Knowledge Hub group on [Improvement and Performance](#) that allows staff to connect digitally with colleagues and experts, share knowledge, insight, and best practices. This is a useful platform for staff to share and ask questions regarding platforms used for performance management.

**Hints and tips:**

Workshop participants were keen to highlight the value of the LGA peer challenge programme. We heard of at least two examples where the opportunity for peer challenge had led to quite significant shifts of thinking and culture on a range of topics, including performance management.

# 9. Appendix

## Definitions of key terms used in this guidance

### **Generalisable**

Generalisable in this context means the findings can be reliably extrapolated from the study to a broader population of patients/service users and/or applied to settings or contexts other than those in which they were tested.<sup>27</sup>

### **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)**

The critical indicators of progress towards an intended result.<sup>28</sup> Often refers to a suite of numerical indicators which are regularly presented to Boards and Strategic Leaders as a means of providing updates and insight on the performance of the organisation.

### **Overview and scrutiny committee**

Overview and scrutiny committees were established by the Local Government Act 2000. They were intended as a counterweight to the new executive structures created by that Act (elected mayors or leaders and cabinets). Their role was to develop and review policy and make recommendations to the council.<sup>29</sup>

### **Results-based Accountability**

Results-based Accountability<sup>30</sup> (RBA) is a model that is firmly focused on understanding experiences and outcomes. It starts with the end outcome or wellbeing goal that a service/agency is trying to bring about and then works backwards to bring about that change through results-based decision-making. It aims to use jargon-free processes, value diversity of opinion and input to formulate step-by-step service planning that will meaningfully bring about change. At its core is the importance of collecting, baselining, and understanding appropriate data to be confident about the direction of travel towards an intended outcome.

### **Qualitative data**

Qualitative data provide an in-depth understanding of behaviours, perceptions, and underlying reasons for social happenings. While quantitative methods are usually used to measure the 'what', qualitative methods are most often used to explore the 'how' and 'why'. Common qualitative data collection methods include in-depth interviews, focus groups, case studies, observation, and ethnography.<sup>31</sup>

**Quantitative data**

Quantitative research explains phenomena according to numerical data, analysed through mathematically based methods, especially statistics.<sup>32</sup>

**Triangulation**

The collection of data using several research methods. This builds confidence in the findings and robustness of the evaluation.<sup>33</sup>

# Endnotes

1. SMART: specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, timely. FABRIC: focused, appropriate, balanced, robust, integrated, cost-effective
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11. Adapted from the blogpost Rethinking Service (available here) and Institute for Government (2021), 'Using targets to improve public services', available at: <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publications/targets-public-services>
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13. Adapted from Kaplan and Norton, 1992
14. More information on Balanced Scorecards can be found at: Balanced Scorecard Software - Free BSC Templates | SmartDraw
15. The terms 'outcomes' and 'impacts' are sometimes used interchangeably by research professionals using a logic model.
16. HM Treasury, Cabinet Office, National Audit Office, Audit Commission, Office for National Statistics (2001)

17. Welsh Government, Using evidence to inform improvement, 2021
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