

Case Study

Dorset County Council: Improving performance and managing risk using LG Inform

Dorset County Council is using the LGA's benchmarking data service, LG Inform, to support both their performance management and their work around risk management. Using LG Inform, members were provided with the information and means to scrutinise how the council's expenditure related to its performance. David Trotter, Corporate Policy and Performance Officer and Mark Taylor, Head of Internal Audit, Insurance and Risk Management at Dorset have been involved in implementing the use of LG Inform for this work.

The challenge

Dorset participated in an LGA peer challenge in July 2013. One of the outcomes from this was recognition that benchmarking was not being routinely used to understand how the council's service expenditure, overheads and performance compared with councils with similar characteristics. A recommendation was made that the county council should routinely use benchmarking to gauge services against similar councils, look at the ratio between cost and performance, and identify opportunities to improve value for money. A Benchmarking Task and Finish Group was established to lead on this work. This included identifying a reliable and effective benchmarking tool, and LG Inform has been used for this purpose.

Mark explains "Whilst LG Inform has been a feature of the councils work for a while now, over the past six months it has really started to gain momentum. Not least through its heightened profile via the new Benchmarking Task and Finish Group and its use in providing useful, timely and easy to interpret content for various council Report".

Using LG Inform to manage risk

Additionally Dorset's corporate plan marked a significant departure from their previous approach. In the aftermath of budget reduction announcements in 2010, the council systematically linked their corporate plan to their budget, so that in addition to setting outcomes, they clearly identified how much they had budgeted to spend on achieving each one. Whilst this served the short term need of providing members and others with the information needed to scrutinise how the county council's expenditure related to its performance, it had the drawback of attempting to include everything the county council did, rather than articulating what were the most important priorities.

As a result of using LG Inform a revised plan now provides a further improvement as the council can now use the information the tool provides to consider high and increasing risks on the Corporate Risk Register and the Forward Together Risk Register. Benchmarking is a key feature and within the current quarterly Corporate Performance Monitoring report the council provide benchmarking against 14 of their measures using LG Inform.

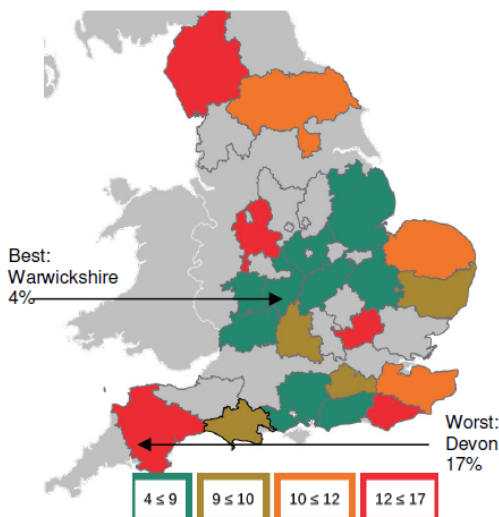
Using LG Inform, the quarterly Corporate Performance Monitoring Reports have linked performance and risk using various charts, maps and data from LG Inform to display this. These display options allow complex information to be displayed to members in an easily accessible way.

Mark explains the benefits of using LG Inform, saying: “this leads to informed analysis and challenge... LG Inform is a key tool to assist in the identification of areas for review, or in other words areas of potential risk (both negative and positive risk)”.

A recent example of a monitoring report is shown below.

Figure 1: LG Inform map used in a Corporate Performance Monitoring Report

- For 2011-12, 10% of Dorset’s non-principal roads were arguably in need of maintenance – the same as the current figure, for Quarter 3 2013-14. In 2011-12 this placed us in the **second quartile** compared to the other English County Councils for which data is available.
- The chart to the right maps 2011-12 non-principal road condition data for English County Councils. Those coloured green had the strongest performance, and those coloured red had the weakest performance. **The average was 10%** - the same as the Dorset figure.
- Consistently, Dorset’s performance for this measure is shown as **red** in our Balanced Scorecard, due to it being 11.1% short of our local 9% target. When compared to other County Councils, however, our performance is average, rather than poor.



Easily accessible data

LG Inform provides the council with up-to-date and high quality data.

The abolition of the National Indicator Set, coupled with funding reductions, had had a knock-on effect on council benchmarking activity. David explains that when considering available tools to help with this issue:

“The council found that lots of benchmarking tools shared the same weakness – they were based on data that tended to be out of date and LG Inform tends to have the very latest available data which is essential”.

Functionality

The map functionality available in LG Inform has been particularly well received by members and officers who find it a useful and clear way of displaying and understanding data. David reports: “It provides an instant snapshot of performance and is a key feature of the functionality within LG Inform. It provides a clear view of performance against a set comparable group”.

Ease of use

Newcomers to LG Inform in the council have found that the search facility is straightforward to use and have benefited from the range of information in the form of reports and metrics that are readily available. Additionally the ability to produce reports within a few minutes of searching for a desired metric has saved time and effort. David explains that it is beneficial to have:

“at the touch of a button, or two, an easy to use performance platform that can provide a quick analysis of performance against a number of comparable groups. LG Inform is a key benchmarking tool for Dorset County Council as it contains so much up to date data, reports and metrics within minutes of searching”.

Users have found that the clear and concise manner in which LG Inform presents data provides them with the ability to focus on a particular area or metric and obtain charts, graphs and data around that topic at speed.

Tool tips

David suggests that users take time to invest in finding out about the range of features in LG Inform. He advises starting with the headline reports:

“The first thing to do would be to select your desired area or postcode and look at the headline report. Once in the headline report navigate between the different metrics and see what you can find. Maybe start to search within the metric name, for example, type recycling or waste and see what LG Informs provides for you”.

For more information about LG Inform please contact: lginform@local.gov.uk

LG Inform can be accessed at the following address: www.lginform.local.gov.uk

For more information on how LG Inform is being used in Dorset please contact:

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