

## **S12. Local Government Benchmarking Framework 2016/17**

The committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services presenting a summary of the Local Government Benchmarking data from 2016/17.

The Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF), had replaced Audit Scotland's Statutory Programme Indicators performance information and had been compiled by the Improvement Service. The Local Government Benchmarking Framework data was a national benchmark which compared Scottish Local Authorities with the aim of improving performance in key areas. It consisted of:-

- a suite of common performance indicators, and
- National events which look at areas of service, what are the differences across all Councils with regards to performance and what lessons can be learned from best practice to improve service provision.

The LGBF was a key element of Audit Scotland's statutory performance reporting framework to review Council's focus on improvement. The data relied upon:-

- Councils preparing information and data returns in a consistent way;
- national data sets being statistically significant in each Council area, and
- the Local Finance Return from each Council being consistently prepared.

It contained 75 indicators covering service cost, service delivery and customer satisfaction and included information on Council's priorities and concerns. It showed where there had been improvement or deterioration together with a comparison against Scottish Local Authorities.

The report highlighted and provided commentary on:-

- indicators by Service;
- comparison to the national average for 2016/17;
- Services' position relative to quartiles.

In addition the report provided analysis on:-

- corporate indicators;
- Children's Services performance;
- Corporate and Housing Services performance;
- Development Services performance;
- Adult Social Work performance;
- Falkirk Community Trust performance.

The respective performance information relating to Adult Social Work and Falkirk Community Trust was presented but would be considered by the Scrutiny Committee (External) as part of its scrutiny of the Integration Joint Board and Falkirk Community Trust.

In response to a question in regard to indicators Env 1-7, the Director of Development Services undertook to provide ward level breakdowns where these were available.

Members questioned whether the introduction of Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) had had a positive impact on indicators CHN 6 and 7 (percentage of pupils living in the 20% most deprived areas gaining 5+ awards at level 5 and level 6 respectively). The Head of Education stated that the information provided was for 2016/17 and as such, the impact of PEF would not be relevant as it was introduced in 2017/18. However, he did expect that it would impact positively in subsequent years' performance. The indicators did not describe the range of qualifications available to pupils. The data was limited to attainment of Highers. The Service was currently collating information on the wider range of qualifications available, in particular to the lowest attaining groups.

Members sought detail on the factors leading to an increase in CHN 22 (percentage of child protection pre-registrations within 18 months) which had risen from 6.9% to 14.2%. The Head of Education stated that this was the first time that this data set had been reported nationally and the Service was currently analysing the factors which contributed to Falkirk Council's ranking of 30 out of 32. The review would include benchmarking with family groups in other Local Authorities in order to identify where improvements could be made.

In response to a question on preschool costs (CH3) members sought information on why costs were higher than Scottish average and whether this was due to the non-statutory provision provided by Falkirk Council which other Local Authorities did not provide. The Head of Education confirmed that this was the case. The Council provided baby provision in some nurseries. This was more expensive to provide than nursery provision and as a consequence the overall cost as measured by the indicator was higher than that recorded by many Authorities.

During discussion, members questioned the quantity of data provided and whether the collection and analysis of performance information in fact encroached on the delivery of services. The Head of Policy, Technology and Improvement reflected that the intent of performance information was to drive improvement in the provision of services. It allowed the Council to not only look at how well it performed but also to look at the services it provides and question whether some functions should be provided, or provided at the same cost. As an example, the Director of Development Services cited the cost of planning (ECON 2) indicator. While it was the case that there was an inconsistency in the methodology used by Councils to calculate this indicator, it showed Falkirk's cost was higher than most Local Authorities. This had led to questions by the Scrutiny Committee and a review of the process within the Service. At the same time, there was recognition within the Scottish Government that there was inconsistency across the country and as part of the introduction of the Planning Bill, a review had been established. This would drive consistency and improvement in the planning services of Local Authorities.

The committee noted that the percentage of the highest paid 5% of employees who are women (Corp 3b) was below the Scottish average and that Falkirk Council ranked 24 out of 32. Members asked why the pay gap still existed. The Director of Corporate and Housing Services explained that this was based on a complicated formula and it was likely that a number of Councils had similar performance with only slight variation between higher ranked Councils and Falkirk. Nonetheless in regard to equal pay claims, it was the case that of those pay claims which remain to be settled, the majority were at the lower end of the pay scale and tended to be jobs which were traditionally performed by women.

Members sought background to the samples used for indicators CHN 10 (percentage of adults satisfied with local schools). In particular, members asked whether the figure was 77% of respondents or 77% of the population and whether the survey was restricted to parents. The Head of Education explained that as the information was drawn from household surveys, he could not confirm the sample size and how many were parents of pupils. He undertook to provide background information to members before the next meeting.

In regard to indicator CHN 11 (percentage of pupils entering positive destinations), which was below the national average, members asked for the definition of a “positive destination”. The Head of Education explained that this was a challenging indicator and the performance was lower than expected. The positive destinations captured were employment or college/university. However, within each category there were fluctuations, for example, pupils who go to college/university but then drop out or go into work but leave to go to college/university. The Service was focussed on providing the right pathways for pupils and for engagement to start not at S4/S5, but at an earlier stage. It was necessary to challenge the traditional pathways and there was positive engagement with Forth Valley College to develop pathways to work. It was key to provide the right tools to make pupils employable and the Head of Education cited examples of the ongoing work with industry to ensure that pupils had the right mix of skills and qualifications to allow them to move into work and further education.

Members then focussed on those indicators for which the Council was in the bottom quartile nationally and sought assurance that Services had strategies in place to review and drive improvement. The Director of Development Services responded that, in regard to ENV 4c (percentage of B class roads that should be considered for maintenance treatment), a report would be submitted to Council. In regard to indicator ENV 7a (percentage of adults satisfied with waste collection) 77% were satisfied, yet data showed that there was a very low rate of missed bin collections. The response may reflect dissatisfaction with the separation of bins or collection frequency. The Service would analyse the information.

## **Decision**

**The committee noted:-**

- (1) Audit Scotland's increased focus on the use of these indicators as a means to drive improvement;**
- (2) the 2016/17 Local Government Benchmarking Framework data for Falkirk Council and Falkirk Community Trust;**
- (3) the indicators improving and deteriorating from 2010/11 to 2016/17;**
- (4) the indicators that compare better and worse than the national average;**
- (5) the indicators that are in the top and bottom quartiles, and**
- (6) the progress with benchmarking family group meetings.**