

## **S6. Local Government Benchmarking Framework 2017/18**

The committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services providing an update on the Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) data for 2017/18.

LGBF was a national approach to preparing, comparing and improving the performance of Councils across Scotland. It had replaced the statutory performance indicators which had been required by Audit Scotland and were compiled by the Improvement Service on behalf of the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE). The LGBF was a suite of common performance indicators and national family group events and was used by Audit Scotland as part of its statutory performance framework and used to assess Council's Focus on improvement.

The LGBF for 2017/18 contained 77 indicators, of which 65 had been published in February 2019. These covered service cost, service delivery and customer satisfaction. Although not perfect, due to inconsistency in how the data was collected, the data, supplemented by local information could be used by the Council to drive improvement.

In regard to the indicators, from 2010/2011 to 2017/18 68% (44) had improved while 32% (21) had deteriorated.

When compared to the national average 71% (46) were better and 29% (19) were worse.

The committee had previously scrutinised the complete data set, most recently in 2018 (ref S12). Members at the time had expressed concern that the volume of information presented in a single report had restricted their ability to readily identify areas for further scrutiny. To assist the committee, each Service, would now include as part of its performance reporting (now to the Scrutiny Committee):-

- Key and important indicators from the LGBF and performance, targets, benchmarks over time by service – this will identify those areas we are seeking to improve in.
- Background and context information on those indicators locally i.e. locality information, other PIs that provide additional analysis.
- How we intend to improve and the steps we are taking to achieve that improvement.
- What further work the Service was doing on that area of service.

Members of the committee considered that the inclusion of the information, in the performance reports would assist the committee in its work. Members asked whether the LGBF information was disseminated to, and considered, by individual Services and to what extent. The Head of Policy, Technology and Improvement explained that this was the case and explained that the Corporate Management Team and Service Management Teams utilised the information to improve performance and service. The Director of Corporate and Housing Services, Head of Planning and Economic Development and

Head of Education each explained how the information was used within their respective services. The Head of Policy, Technology and Improvement also explained, in response to a question, that each Council used benchmarking family groups to compare and share best practice and to learn. SOLACE oversaw the process.

In regard to indicator CHN10 - adults satisfied with local schools, members sought further information on whether the survey had been restricted to parents of pupils or included all adults. The Head of Education explained that the survey had included adults other than parents and carers and was part of a wider Scottish Household Survey. The Chief Executive explained that the sample they used from the Scottish Household Survey was small and it was this survey upon which % satisfaction indicators in the LGBF were based. The Head of Education added that the service and schools carried out their own surveys with parents. The deterioration recorded by the indicator was disappointing and the Service was looking to better understand the reasons for the dissatisfaction. It was the case however that parents tended to express concerns at a local level rather than to the centre. Attainment results were positive and schools were doing a good job so it was important to understand why 30% of adults surveyed were not satisfied with local schools.

The committee discussed CHN3 - cost per preschool education place. This was £5431, 16th most expensive. The Head of Education, in response to a question, confirmed that the costs included former social work nursery provision which was not statutory day care and which many Local Authorities did not provide. Historically the Council had agreed to provide this care. It was important, members suggested, that the Service look at its provision and determine whether additional and costly care could be provided in a less costly way or whether it should be provided at all.

In regard to ECON4 - % of procurement spent on local enterprises, members welcomed an increase from 18.4% to 32.17% and suggested that it should be higher. The Head of Planning and Economic Development stated that the Service worked closely with the procurement team to enable and support local suppliers in order that they can tender for work.

The committee highlighted ECON7 - adults satisfied with refuse collection which had reduced from 77% to 69% this ranked Falkirk Council at 31 out of 32. Mr Duff stated that the sample size was small, approximately 100 households, and was not reflective of local satisfaction. The Chief Executive concurred that small sample sizes could produce anomalous and unreflective feedback. Nationally SOLACE was looking at ways of improving this measure. Results from the Scottish Household Survey were based on a survey of adults – so a survey on waste collection would in all probability include a high proportion of waste collection service users but a lower proportion of parents so the results in regard to satisfaction of waste services and of local schools could not be equally relied upon to be reflective of user's satisfaction. Members suggested that local, larger, survey would produce more reliable indication of user satisfaction. The Chief Executive explained that local surveys were conducted, for example using the citizen's panel, but the point of the LGBF was to produce Scotland wide results for comparison

across Councils. Local surveys did yield more informative and useful outputs but a national indicator had value too, albeit with caveats around the sample size and make up of the sample.

Following a question the Head of Planning and Economic Development summarised the results so far of a trend to use synthetic plastic material to fill pot holes. Indicator ECON4(c) 3% of B class roads which should be considered for maintenance treatment had increased from 39.56% to 42.09%. Should the trial prove successful, Mr Duff suggested, the indicator would improve. Again however Mr Duff questioned the robustness of the indicator. Benchmarking with other Local Authority Family groups suggested that the Council's costs were lower than Authorities of a similar size.

The committee considered that the report generally showed an improving Council. However members questioned the robustness of the data set and the validity of the Scottish Household Survey information. The Head of Policy, Technology and Improvement concurred that the value in itself of SHHS data was questionable and should be looked at in conjunction with other performance information.

Ms Campbell explained that the report gave an overview and Services would provide analysis as part of their performance reporting schedule to the Scrutiny Committee which could include the results of local surveys to supplement the national data.

The Chief Executive concurred recalling that the LGBF was an improvement on the previous Audit Scotland indicators. The information on service performance and on cost of service provision was useful. In regard to the latter cost was a more subtle issue. Higher cost was not necessarily negative - it could be an indicator of being where we wanted to be in regard to provision of a service. However cost indicators were useful when looking to drive efficiencies. For example a high cost good service was not necessarily negative but a high cost low performing service would be one which would be scrutinised. In regard to SHHS information, the Chief Executive, the committee was correct to question its value. The important question in regard to user satisfaction was what the Council was doing to measure user satisfaction. Members agreed and generally welcomed the information with the caveat that the SHHS data was not reflective necessarily of the local view. The Head of Policy, Technology and Improvement stated again that the information would be contained within performance reports and could be viewed at this level as a 'can opener' to enable members to begin to formulate their questions ahead of more detailed and contextualised information coming forward in the individual service performance reports.

## **Decision**

**The committee noted:-**

- (1) Audit Scotland's increased focus on the use of Local Government Benchmarking Framework indicators as a means to drive improvement;**

- (2) 2017/18 Local Government benchmarking Framework data for Falkirk Council, the IJB and Falkirk Community Trust;**
- (3) the indicators that were improving and deteriorating from 2010/11 to 2017/18, set out in appendix 1 of the report;**
- (4) the indicators that compared better and worse than the national average, set out in appendix 2 of the report;**
- (5) the indicators that were in the top and bottom quartiles, set out in appendix 3 of the report; and**
- (6) that individual Service reports would be presented to future meetings for consideration.**