

BRIEFING NOTE TITLE: IPP 2017 preparation

NB - the briefing note should be 2 pages maximum. If longer it will be edited.

OBJECTIVE:
In readiness for the IPP scrutiny Members would like an overview of bench marking and the ability to confidently compare national data.

BACKGROUND
As part of the IPP process departments are asked to supply benchmarking data. Members are unclear if recent changes to the collection of benchmarking data have had a negative impact on the quality or reliability of the comparative results.

QUESTIONS TO BE ADDRESSED:
1. A query has arisen in view of changes to the gathering of benchmark data which was introduced by the government in recent years.
2. And is there any scope to improve benchmarking both in the short and medium term?

OUTCOME/S:
1. Members have a better understanding of benchmarking used as part of IPP
2. Are better informed within a Hertfordshire context.

LEAD OFFICER	Owen Mapley, Director of Resources
---------------------	------------------------------------

DATE DUE: 19 September 2016

The “Reducing Burdens” policy introduced by the last government and the demise of the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) performance framework has had a negative impact on the availability of national benchmarking data. This has been an issue for local authorities. Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) was already developing an approach linked to the IPP process which ensures appropriate benchmarking information is available to meaningfully compare and evaluate performance. The approach centres on using multiple sources of benchmarking information of sufficient quality and currency which is fit for the purpose, recognising that diverse organisational structures operate in local authorities.

1. National benchmarking data sources and tools - A number of sources of national benchmarking data still exist, often where there a statutory requirement to collect and publish data, or where the sector has continued to generate comparative information even though there is no statutory requirement to do so. Where these are available our services routinely use them for comparative reporting and analysis purposes. Examples include the Public Health Outcomes Framework, the Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework, the Children in Care Performance Tables and Waste DataFlow. All published datasets are recorded on the national Local Government (LG) Inform system (to which we subscribe).
2. CIPFA benchmarking packages - CIPFA offer several benchmarking packages, these include the Corporate Services benchmarking clubs, corporate financial statistics and their Value for Money toolkit. They rely on authorities signing up to providing their data which is then shared on a subscription basis. As the number of

BRIEFING NOTE TITLE: IPP 2017 preparation

NB - the briefing note should be 2 pages maximum. If longer it will be edited.

- subscribers has dwindled, perhaps in line with national developments, so the value of the service has reduced. HCC subscribes to a range of CIPFA products.
3. Family Group benchmarking clubs - There are several issues associated with relying exclusively on national benchmarking data – it is often out of date by the time it is made available, the data does not provide any meaningful insight into the organisational structure/service model which sits behind the figures. Accordingly, as part of the IPP process, services develop more informal benchmarking clubs. These ‘Family Groups’ have been well established in many services for some considerable time and tend to focus around geography (e.g. Eastern Region), or those authorities with a similar demography (e.g. statistical neighbours). They provide valuable insight as the members of the family group are more prepared to share the delivery model which sits behind the figures because of the nature of the data sharing arrangement.
 4. In depth comparisons - HCC also undertake some in depth comparative work with one or a number of authorities of a similar size and demography. For example, back-office costs were examined in detail in work carried out with Hampshire in 2012 and Essex in 2014. The outputs from this work have fed into the IPP process.
 5. LG Inform - The LG Inform system allows customised reports to be developed comparing an authority’s performance against standard or custom comparators. All national indicators are automatically fed into the LG Inform system as they are published. However the current policy is for all data to be made public after 12 months, which is not appropriate for local benchmarking where data is frequently provisional.

HCC have built on an approach which makes best use of available national benchmarking data and tools, supplemented with a drive to develop local benchmarking arrangements to provide meaningful and actionable information to inform the IPP process, service planning and performance monitoring. This has militated against the potentially negative impact that the recent changes to the gathering of benchmarking data might have had on the quality and reliability of the comparative data we use for the IPP process.

HCC continue to look at ways in which to further improve the quality, currency and usefulness of our comparative data. The improvement areas include:

- Developing regional benchmarking arrangements, building on the Children’s Services benchmarking service we co-ordinate and deliver for authorities in the eastern region and the benchmarking provided nationally for the National Association of Waste Disposal Authorities
- Maintaining an up to date central register of all benchmarking clubs in HCC so that a more co-ordinated approach can be taken, with particular emphasis on identifying and addressing any overlaps and gaps in coverage
- More effective promotion and use of the LGA’s “LG Inform” benchmarking tool