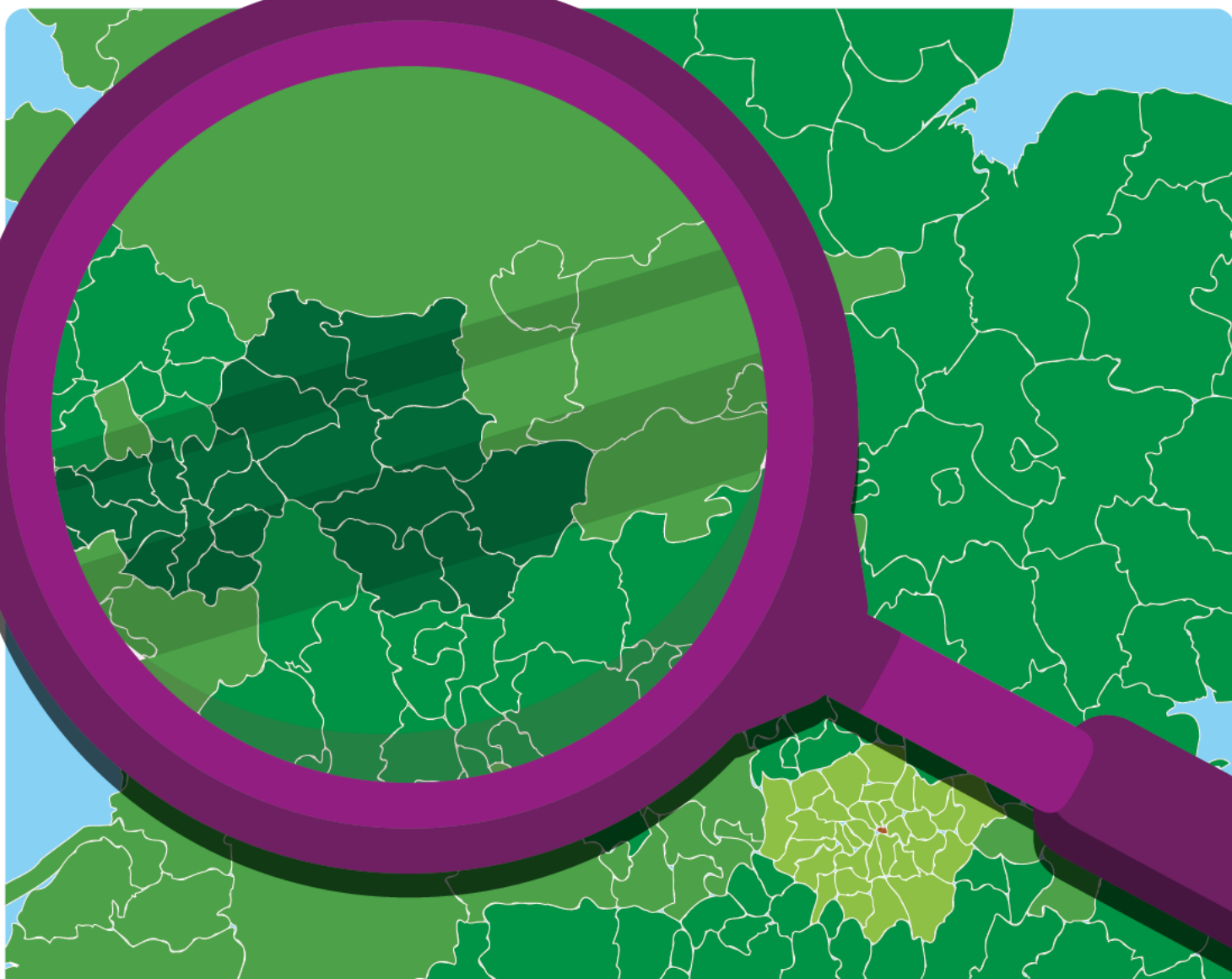


# Performance management in local authorities

Key messages from panel  
conversations 2023 - 2025



Icons in the cover image and throughout the report are made by Freepik from <https://www.flaticon.com/>

To view more research from the Local Government Association Research and Information team please visit: <https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/research>

# Contents

Introduction .....	1
Context.....	2
Organisational arrangements .....	2
Performance management culture .....	4
Performance management frameworks .....	7
Outcome based performance management.....	9
Performance measures and target setting .....	12
Performance reporting .....	14
Data management and performance reporting systems .....	18
Benchmarking and public reporting.....	22

# Introduction

Since 2022, the Local Government Association (LGA) has been convening performance management panels for local government, bringing together small groups of performance leads to share experiences and learning.

These panels are run free of charge as part of the LGA's improvement support to the sector. Sessions provide a confidential space for officers to share and discuss their approaches to performance management. Local authorities at all levels attend, ranging from those with an advanced approach to performance management through to those at an earlier stage and looking to develop.

During 2023/24 and 2024/25, 18 virtual panels were held, with 176 officers from 126 councils and combined authorities attending. This report aims to share the learning from these more widely, summarising key messages, reflections and challenges identified by participants. The report draws on examples and insights from local authorities who attended the sessions and therefore does not make generalisations about the sector as a whole.

It is structured around the following key performance management themes:

- organisational arrangements
- performance management culture
- performance management frameworks
- outcome based performance management
- performance measures and target setting
- performance reporting
- data management and performance reporting systems
- benchmarking and public reporting.

## Context

The performance management panels were delivered virtually and were two hours in length. The sessions were semi-structured with two or three participants giving a short presentation on an aspect of their approach to performance management, as well as time for discussion and learning. In addition to sharing information and learning they also connected officers from different parts of the country.

The panels form part of a [wider support offer from the LGA](#) to help local authorities to deliver effective performance management, including action learning sets, training for councillors, and masterclasses. This sits within the wider [better use of data programme](#), which offers a range of free-to-access support to help local authorities recognise the full value of data and make good use of it for decision-making, bringing better outcomes for local areas.

The following sections go on to summarise key messages, reflections and challenges arising from the panel discussions for each theme, as well as highlighting interesting examples.

## Organisational arrangements

Amongst panel attendees, the size, structure and location of performance teams and their roles and responsibilities varied significantly. This depended on factors such as organisation size, available budgets, historic arrangements, and the status of performance management within organisations.

At district level, teams were mostly very small, and many had been or were currently subject to cuts because of financial pressures. In larger authorities, there continues to be a mix of centralised and 'hub and spoke' models.

Panel attendees saw the benefits of centralised functions as being more professionalised, offering economies of scale and scope, and greater resilience. The disadvantages related to a lack of immediate service knowledge, needing to invest in

building relationships and potentially being (or being perceived to be) a bottleneck and less agile, flexible and responsive to service needs and wants.

Authorities with advanced and agile performance reporting were often those where the performance function was integrated with business intelligence and data functions.

Where there are small central teams, participants pointed out the importance of clarity of purpose and function as well as the creation of networks or performance communities across the organisation. There can be resistance from directorates to centralise the performance management function for fear of loss of resources or autonomy.

Feedback from panel participants suggests that often, and in district councils particularly, the grouping of related corporate functions with performance management (often including business planning, risk management, data analysis and business intelligence) fosters synergies and can lead to developing a single source of data and comprehensive single reporting.

Some participating district councils located their performance management function within customer services, organisational development or transformation functions. Feedback from attendees was that this frames the purpose and culture of the function as being about learning, exploration, improvement and customer focus. It can also support improvement by drawing on the skills and capacity of the host services.

**Example: Oadby and Wigston Borough Council**

The performance management function is located within the council's customer services and transformation team. When a backlog in processing planning applications led to rising numbers of complaints, they reached out to the planning team to offer support.

A review of customer insight information highlighted increasing levels of customers chasing up their application which prevented planning officers from doing their day job. The teams clarified service standards and introduced a planning duty system to triage calls, operated by customer services. The website was improved to enable customers to self-serve. A customer satisfaction survey was launched that helped the planning team to understand what was important to customers and how they wanted to be communicated with.

As a result of these actions, over a period of six months, customer satisfaction improved significantly.

A [fuller case study](#) of Oadby and Wigston's approach to performance management is also available.

## Performance management culture

Panel participants stressed that performance management culture will evolve over time and requires explicit and continuous leadership which must start at the most senior level of an organisation.

Leaders must (and must be seen to) convincingly articulate the 'why' of performance management. They must display clear leadership by being interested, enabling effective performance conversations, holding directors to account and creating a culture of trust and learning.

Performance is ultimately the responsibility of leaders and managers, not the performance team. Experienced, passionate and supportive performance management teams play a key part in enabling a corporate performance management culture by designing and supporting a process where accountability rests with services. This can be a tricky balance and requires strong back up and support from senior leaders as well adequate capacity.

A key message from participants was that performance management teams should consider how they can support managers and councillors in what they do. They need to build understanding and relationships with their 'clients'; tell the story and explain as opposed to just presenting the data and should focus on the exception and the important. They need to act as a critical friend and support chief executives, directors and senior councillors. However, skills and capacity shortfalls are an issue in many councils, especially smaller district councils.

Any changes to performance management systems, particularly using new technology, requires buy-in and leadership from the chief executive, senior officers and councillors. Some attendees felt that their leadership didn't fully understand or grasp the opportunities that data and technology hold.

With more agile or real time performance reporting can come a greater exposure to fluctuations in performance, potentially without narrative. Managing this requires a shift from 'explaining and justifying' to 'enquiring and exploring', as well as an understanding of key data concepts amongst councillors and other end customers to ensure performance figures are interpreted correctly. Performance teams should also ensure data is presented with sufficient context, such as time series data.

There is a requirement for a fundamental shift in how performance management is framed. One participant said that "we need to shift to a 'black box thinking' approach with relentless focus on improvement as opposed to blame. This requires a culture that assumes that people go to work in order to do a good job".

Black box thinking is a term coined by Matthew Syed. It is a concept that encourages us to learn from failure. It draws inspiration from the aviation industry, where black boxes record input and output data. Where there is a malfunction or error, authorities can investigate what went wrong.

Indeed, performance management is most meaningful and effective when it is about learning. To meet the complexities of people's lives, performance management

should enable a process of ongoing exploration and problem solving to meet people's and communities' unique circumstances.

This requires leaders and managers to nurture an effective learning culture which enables adaptation and supports continuous improvement in the quality and effectiveness of services. Trust, openness, and the absence of blame are necessary conditions for individuals and teams to engage in conversations about performance that will lead to improvements.

Linking performance management to corporate values and behavioural frameworks is a good way of embedding its practice. Where the function is not centralised, performance management networks or communities of practice, bringing together performance leads from across the organisation, are important tools to build engagement, capacity, and expertise across organisations. They also offer opportunities to listen, build engagement, drive appropriate consistency and respond to concerns before they turn into disengagement.

#### **Example: Staffordshire County Council**

Staffordshire County Council operates a distributed performance management model where directorates host their own performance management function and resources with a small, centralised team responsible for corporate performance management reporting.

The adult social care directorate is very deliberately creating a performance management culture of 'learning and improvement'. Careful use of language is part of this, and the performance team uses terminology such as 'talk to action', 'continuous improvement', 'learning' and 'critical friends' as opposed to the more traditional terminology of performance challenge. The aim is for this to lead to more collaboration and open and honest performance conversations without the fear of blame.

## Performance management frameworks

Many authorities use performance management frameworks to illustrate the purpose, processes, responsibilities and accountabilities of the performance management process. They articulate the 'why' and are best when simple and where complexity is illustrated visually. Embedding performance management frameworks takes time (often years) and commitment. Eventually they will take on a dynamic of their own and become business as usual.

Integrating financial and performance planning and reporting was seen by many participants as essential. Some authorities are designing planning processes where they bring together policy, risk, resources and performance to balance what they need to achieve, the resources they have and the performance they require or can afford, reconciled with the risks of not delivering or delivering to a certain standard.

The 'golden threads' of priorities in council plans that filter down to individuals are important, as are the clear connections between strategies and service planning. The alignment of council plans and medium-term financial strategies are essential in reconciling performance and resources.

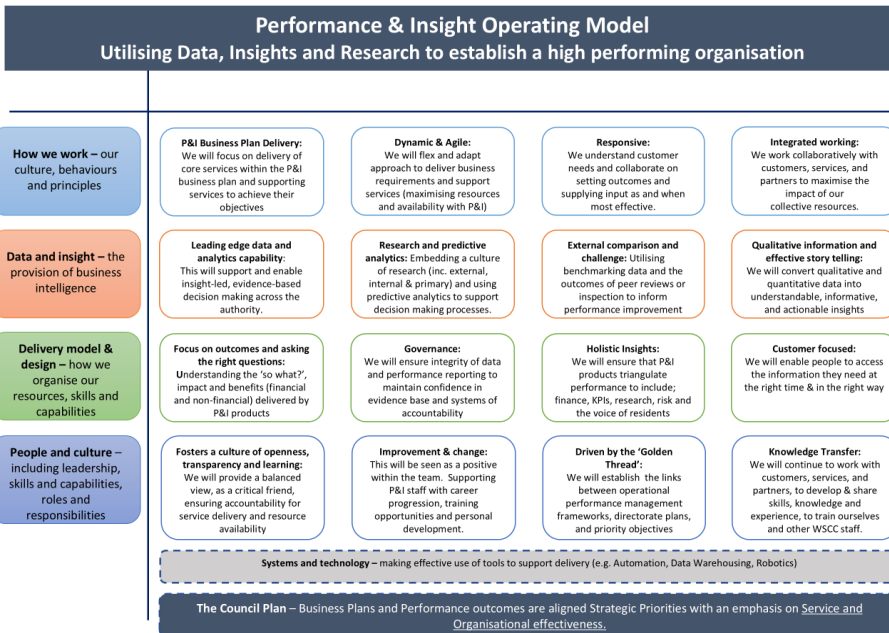
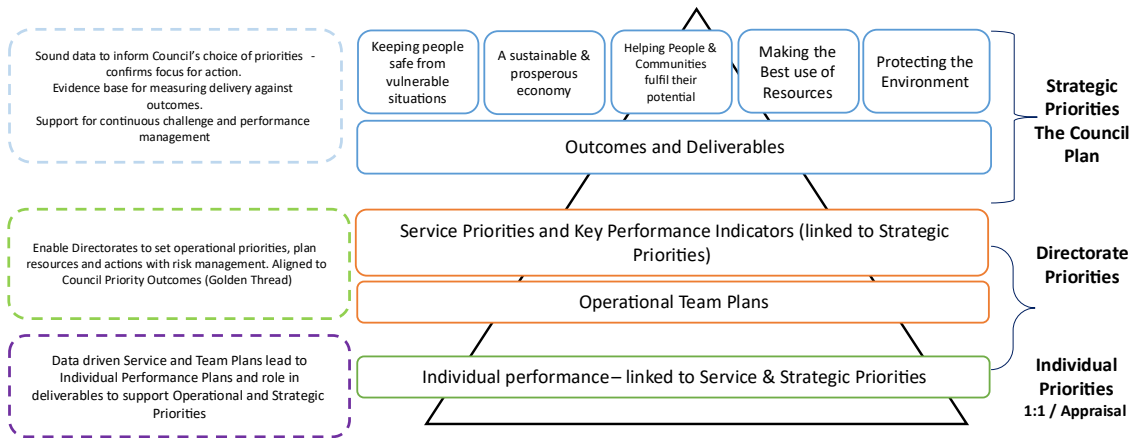
Many authorities adopt a 'golden thread' 'pyramid style', with the council plan (or equivalent) being the 'why', along with themes and priorities. Some call it the 'line of sight' to help each part of the organisation and individual employee understand their contribution to achieving council priorities.

Documented frameworks are seen to be helpful in rationalising performance reporting and deciding what needs to be reported where. Some authorities distinguish between strategic (reporting to committee/cabinet), tactical (data used by senior managers) and operational (data used at service level). This distinction enables a reduction in the amount of performance data, making it more relevant and useful.

## Example: West Sussex County Council

West Sussex have created a succinct framework setting out the 'why' and 'how' of performance management, its governance and reporting, and the business planning cycle. The service has also articulated its operating model on a page.

### WSCC Performance Management Framework 2023/25



- Key delivery business partners – internal**
- Service Data & Insights professionals
  - Finance Business Partners
  - Risk & audit
  - Commissioning & procurement
  - HR
  - IT Systems and Business Intelligence
- External drivers**
- National statutory frameworks
  - Health partners / ICS
  - VCFs

## Outcome based performance management

There is an ongoing debate about whether performance management should focus only on what authorities have control over or whether it should be about the wider outcomes for a place, which authorities contribute to but don't control. It is often the case currently that authorities focus on the former.

At the same time, there is an increased recognition (including for example the [Human Learning Systems approach](#)) that outcomes for residents are delivered by systems rather than individual organisations, and that traditional and linear performance management approaches don't reflect what matters to citizens. Traditional approaches can also fail to reflect the fact that several different parts of an authority will impact the same outcome.

In response, some authorities are designing outcome-based performance management frameworks which councils will report against in the knowledge that they only contribute to some or some aspects of the measures. This requires a different culture and approach to performance monitoring and challenge, often involving partners. In some cases, authorities draw on agreed shared strategies such as 'local outcome frameworks' set by partnerships such as the local health and wellbeing board, or a bespoke place dashboard, that draws on data sources from partners.

Discussions at the panels highlighted consensus that such approaches needed to have political commitment and that developing outcome-based frameworks is an iterative process, taking into consideration what is important to residents and exploring and agreeing a set of measures that have a proven causal link to an outcome. It is important that some of these have a degree of control from the authority whilst others might be controlled by other agencies with local authorities being important influencers. There may be others where there is neither control nor influence but which provide important context.

Authorities are using varying methodologies or logic models to determine and guide the process of defining outcomes. Some find that a greater focus on outcome-based reporting is achieving more buy-in, ownership and accountability from managers as it reduces the dissonance many experience with linear reporting mechanisms in a world of complexity. In some authorities, a change in political administration or changes in the executive team has led to a greater focus on outcomes.

## Example: London Borough of Barking & Dagenham

The council has defined 54 outcome measures spanning the seven priorities in its 2023-26 Corporate Plan. They are tracked through an [outcomes framework performance report](#) which provides regular reporting to cabinet, overview and scrutiny and other stakeholders.

## Outcome Measures

### Residents are supported during the current cost-of-living crisis

- Percentage of residents that indicate they know where and how to access help about cost of living
- Percentage of residents that feel they are more financially resilient because of the support they receive
- Situation of food poverty locally
- Percentage of households in fuel poverty
- HAM Hub Income maximisation
- Percentage of rent collected
- Percentage Council tax collected

### Residents are safe, protected, and supported at their most vulnerable

- Referrals to children's social care within 12 months of earlier referral (%)
- The percentage of children becoming the subject of a Child Protection Plan for a second or subsequent time in the year to date
- Percentage of children living in foster care
- The proportion of children in care experiencing long term placement stability
- Percentage of care leavers (aged 17-24) who are in Employment, Education and Training (EET)
- Juvenile first time entrants to the criminal justice system
- Overall satisfaction of people who use services with their care and support
- Proportion of concluded Section 42 safeguarding enquiries where action was taken, and risk was reduced or removed
- Reduced admissions into care homes (people aged 65+, per 100,000 people)

### Residents live healthier, happier, independent lives for longer

- School readiness - percentage of children achieving a good level of development at the end of Reception

- Year 6 - Prevalence of overweight (including obesity)
- Percentage of adults (aged 18+) classified as overweight or obese
- Percentage of residents with a positive social prescribing outcome

### Residents prosper from good education, skills development, and secure employment

- Percentage of schools rated as Good or Outstanding - All Schools
- Percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard at KS2 in reading, writing and maths
- Average Attainment 8 score
- A-Levels: % B or above
- Progression rates to Higher Education
- The number of last year's Year 11's in our schools who are in an apprenticeship
- Proportion of 16 and 17 year olds who were not in education, employment or training (NEET), or their activity was not known
- Employment Rate

### Residents benefit from inclusive growth and regeneration

- Creating vibrant communities and places (a measure relating to individual's connection to culture, heritage, place) TBC
- Number of new homes completed
- Total amount spent on new/improved infrastructure
- Total annual jobs growth
- Increase in gross median annual pay (full time workers)

### Residents live in, and play their part in creating, safer, cleaner, and greener neighbourhoods

- Percentage of household waste recycled
- Household waste per head of population (Kg/person)
- Fly-tipping incidents (per 1,000 people)
- Annual Reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by tonne

- Improved street and environmental cleanliness
- The number of anti-social behaviour complaints made to the council
- Violence against the person offences recorded (number)
- Knife Crime with Injury (number), then added of which of these are aged 1-24
- The Number of Stalking and harassment offences reported to and recorded by the police
- The number of Hate Crime offences reported to the police
- Perceptions of safety at night
- The number of Domestic Abuse Offences reported to the police
- Number of Green flags awarded to LBBD parks
- Number of homes and buildings which have received retrofit measures and/or renewables

### Residents live in good housing and avoid becoming homeless

- Number of households prevented from becoming homeless
- Overall tenant satisfaction with housing management service
- Percentage of Local Authority housing stock that is non-decent
- PRPL: Number of licenced properties
- PRPL: Number of non-compliant properties brought up to compliance
- Total number of households in Temporary Accommodation
- Total number of people sleeping rough

**Barking & Dagenham**

To support consistent and transparent reporting, the council has produced an Outcomes Framework Measure Handbook. This Handbook sets out the rationale for each measure, including agreed targets, source data, calculation methods, and

review processes. It ensures a clear audit trail and promotes data integrity, enabling robust performance tracking and informed decision-making.

While the Framework itself drives alignment between services and Corporate Plan priorities, the Handbook strengthens the credibility of reporting and supports continuous improvement. Together, they demonstrate the council's commitment to responsible governance and effective performance management.

In some councils, where priorities are cross-organisational and are being delivered by teams across the authority, there is senior level 'cross-sponsorship' (with a sponsor and co-sponsors) from different parts of the organisation. This is helpful in breaking down organisational barriers. Centrally based units that provide expertise (for example data and insight) and support in planning and convening these approaches are needed.

The panels highlighted some examples of local authorities who have developed data and insight tools to understand complex outcomes such as financial vulnerability. They bring together multiple datasets and overlay this with geographic information at ward/household levels (using for example UPRNs – [unique property reference numbers](#)) in order to be more nuanced and targeted in making decisions. In some cases, they are available or even designed to support external stakeholders and communities.

#### **Example: Manchester City Council**

Manchester City Council is working to support neighbourhoods and partnerships with intelligence and performance information. Each of the city's 12 neighbourhoods has a 'team around the neighbourhood' (TAN) made up of local stakeholders, including the council, police, housing and the voluntary and community sector. Each TAN has a neighbourhood intelligence champion to support the work with appropriate research and intelligence. This provides the

team with an important opportunity to understand place-based issues and challenges and build relationships with a locality.

The wider performance, research and intelligence team brings together data skills, research, analytics, data governance, engagement and consultation and business intelligence expertise from individual services into a central team. Working with data partners across the area, it creates a range of sophisticated 'insight tools', for example an economic monitor for the city, cost of living analysis and an interactive storyboard for the [State of the City](#).

### **Example: Trafford Council**

The [Trafford Data Lab](#) supports decision-making in Trafford by revealing patterns in data through visualization. The council is committed to publishing open data and using open source tools to encourage a transparent and reproducible analytical workflow. It is created in house by developers using HTML, CSS, JavaScript and R, and is hosted on GitHub. All outputs are open source. Two staff members and a manager support the on-going development.

## Performance measures and target setting

In identifying performance measures, many councils distinguish between council plan and directorate or service measures. Panel discussions showed a commonly held view that performance measures need to tell a story. The number of performance measures varied significantly amongst the local authorities that attended the panels.

The majority of local authorities that attended the panels applied targets to most measures and many use a Red/Amber/Green (RAG) rating system. Whilst this is a common practice and has benefits such as being easy to engage with and allowing potential issues to be highlighted swiftly, they should be used with caution as they

can hide the nuances of performance. More information is available in the LGA's [performance management guide for officers](#).

A small number of councils attending the panels considered that it is better to work towards continuous improvement than to get distracted by targets. Some councils recognised the need to amend targets mid-year (following a process) if they are unlikely to be achieved, providing that this is for a good reason. If managed properly, this practice can keep the performance management function current, and staff engaged.

The process of 'sign off' on performance measures and targets needs to take account of stakeholders at different levels of the organisation. Negotiations with councillors about what gets reported are important and panel attendees reported that at times a balance needs to be struck between political preference and the requirements of a performance management framework.

Many councils review targets annually in line with business planning processes. The rigour and methods around target setting varies. Some councils use [LG Inform](#) (the free to access local area benchmarking tool from the LGA, which has a huge wealth of published data at council level) and other sources to correlate costs and performance. Some also undertook some value for money benchmarking studies to inform the setting of performance measures and realistic targets.

Councils attending the panels reported different approaches to tolerance levels (the acceptable amount of variation in a measurement) with many opting for five per cent across the range, whilst others varied tolerance levels depending on the type of measure. One council reported tolerance levels of 10 per cent except for compliance indicators (such as inspections) where there is no tolerance and key performance indicators (KPIs) are simply met or not met.

## Performance reporting

Most councils on the panels operated on a quarterly performance monitoring and review cycle. Typical cycles of performance reporting reflect the concept of the 'golden thread' and will normally include a suite of reporting:

- cabinet/committee and scrutiny
- executive leadership team
- directorate leadership team
- tactical and operational performance meetings
- 1:1 staff meetings (performance and development reviews and so on).

Many councils have bespoke reports for different audiences. There are various practices to structure information and ensure time for purposeful conversations. For example, one council is introducing a reporting cycle that adopts a particular focus (business as usual and resources, corporate health, inspections/risks/deep dives) for each month in a quarter. The need to include appropriate contextual information about 'the wider system and place' when reporting was highlighted by many.

Many panel attendees were putting a focus on corporate health measures with the creation of bespoke, often monthly corporate health reports. These tend to be internal reports to senior management that focus on the direction of travel and give early warnings. Typical categories and measures might include:

- residents (customer satisfaction, complaints)
- governance (Freedom of Information requests, audit, various compliance measures)
- finance (budget variance, savings achieved, capital programme, income, debt)
- staff (workforce movement, sickness, training update, staff survey indicators)

- procurement and contract management
- safety and security (data breaches, IT incidents, website accessibility score).

These reports then trigger deep dives and further conversations.

### **Example: Wirral Council**

In response to the chief executive requesting assurance that operational performance in all key areas of the council was being delivered and monitored, the insight team developed an online app. It brings together a range of council data sets in one place including:

- finance (revenue forecast, approved savings monitoring, capital spend)
- audit (implementation of audit recommendations)
- risk (corporate and operational)
- HR (workforce data, assigned learning completions)
- health and safety incidents
- information management
- complaints
- councillor and MP enquiries
- committee statistics
- directorate business plans.

Datasets were co-produced with directorates to ensure that the best data was being used, and to identify opportunities for automation. The use of Power BI as a reporting tool allows interactivity, including an ability to view different directorate responses, time periods and data sets, as well as allowing strong use of visuals.

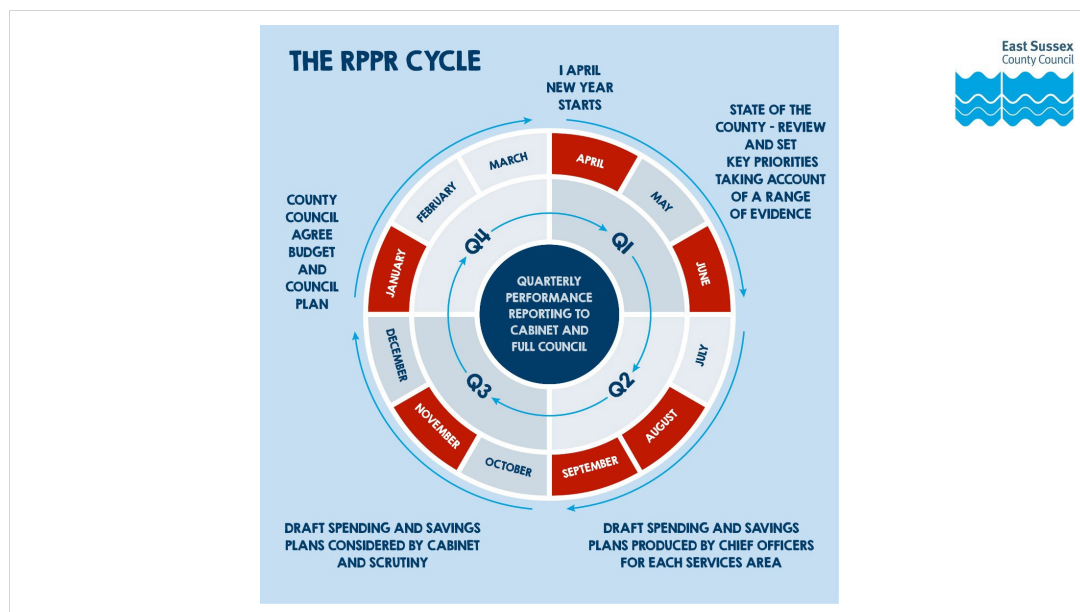
There is a bimonthly operational performance group that reviews the data and reports to the council's senior leadership team. The app has successfully raised awareness of performance issues and given directors the insight they need to act.

Integrated performance planning and reporting with finance was seen by many panel attendees as crucial. Making this work requires collaboration in working across different systems and reporting timescales. Moving away from static reports to agile reporting (for example interactive dashboards with regularly updated data that can be used in performance discussions and meetings dynamically) can facilitate integrated reporting as it can accommodate different timescales for data generation.

### Example: East Sussex County Council

The council has an established integrated business planning and performance process that reconciles policy, performance and resources with planning and performance monitoring throughout the year.

There is a clear alignment between the council plan and the medium-term financial strategy, and a suite of processes, templates and an agreed timetable for reporting that also includes risk management.



There was much discussion in the panels about how to plan and facilitate effective performance review and challenge that leads to learning and improvement. Some councils schedule focused, often branded, performance meetings (for example performance clinics) which allow dedicated time to review and challenge performance.

These sessions tend to be focused on a specific area of underperformance or allow deeper and more informed discussions. It is important that discussions are led by those responsible for the service and that performance/insight teams play a facilitative role in selecting themes and providing data and insights.

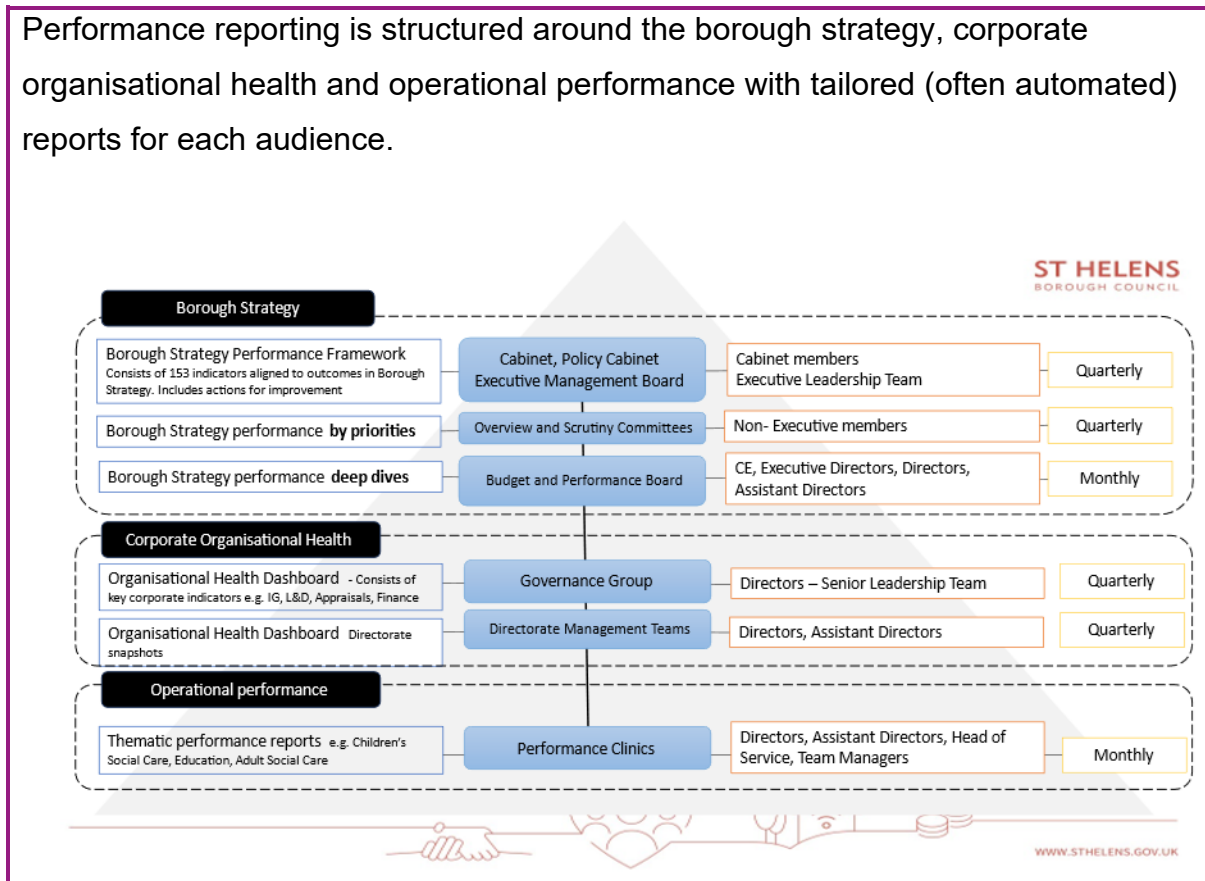
Meetings need to be framed and chaired in an open, curious and inquisitive way to genuinely unpick complex problems or remove blockages. In one council these meetings are intentionally set as 'corporate discussions' where the senior team is collectively responsible to explore how performance can be improved. This leads to much more collaborative approaches and often better solutions to service challenges.

Many participants report on a quarterly cycle through more traditional reports or interactive dashboards, depending on the performance management systems and resources available. There tend to be different arrangements for public facing and internal reports.

**Example: St Helens Borough Council**

St Helens has a centralised performance and business intelligence team that is based within the policy and transformation department. The council has a well embedded performance management framework that is aligned to the priorities and objectives of the four-year borough strategy.

Performance reporting is structured around the borough strategy, corporate organisational health and operational performance with tailored (often automated) reports for each audience.



## Data management and performance reporting systems

Many councils that attended the panels were moving from bespoke performance management systems and instead designing their own, drawing on Microsoft functionality and tools. They reported several practical benefits, such as easier access (no additional licenses or logins) and the scope for bespoke and tailored reporting.

Councils are at different stages. In smaller councils there can be a trepidation of what such a change will require, particularly where there is little knowledge, capacity and capability and possibly an absence of a senior sponsor with vision and confidence in the art of the possible.

Discussions highlighted a strong need for pooled resource, leadership, skills and organisational will to introduce a corporate system that replaces a commonly cited

'grown ecology' of excel spreadsheets within councils. Centralised data handling and automated processes remains the goal for many councils attending the panels. Some councils run reports off data lakes or data warehouses, whilst others extract data via excel. Many are using external data-sources, including [LG Inform](#) and [LG Inform Value for Money](#).

Some councils continue to use spreadsheets, often held on shared platforms such as SharePoint or Teams. This can work well if they are kept simple and easy to maintain and are part of an established system that is working well, with good cooperation and buy-in from officers. However, an over reliance on manual processes has the potential to cause inefficiencies, data quality and version control issues. The LGA offers a [range of support](#) for councils who would like to start improving their data maturity.

Other councils continue the use of bespoke performance management systems (such as Pentana or CorVu) as their 'base system/repository' and use Power BI for enhanced reporting. This is particularly the case in smaller councils (including many district councils) where these systems are part of an established and well-functioning data entry process and provide an audit trail, and a single performance dataset, and where licensing costs are relatively inexpensive.

#### **Example: Bath & North East Somerset**

The council has developed an integrated reporting framework (IRF) that is hosted by Microsoft (MS Fabric) and feeds a range of Power BI reports, with some direct connections to data sources. Staff access the system via the council's intranet front page with direct access to content via Teams and the internet.

The system makes good use of LG Inform data using an API (a connector which pipes data from LG Inform straight into the council's systems – this is available via [LG Inform Plus](#)). The IRF caters to different audiences:

- quarterly strategic reporting and informing annual plan and strategies (for the cabinet and health and wellbeing board)
- directorate 1:1s
- operational activities (such as team meetings).

A [fuller case study](#) of Bath and North East Somerset's approach to performance management is also available.

### **Example: Runnymede Borough Council**

Corporate performance is part of the council's programme management office (PMO) with responsibility for planning, project and risk management as well as business intelligence. The PMO has developed a single, trusted source of data and 'one version of the truth' to produce a comprehensive suite of reporting on delivering of activities aligned to the Corporate Business Plan.

Using existing technology within MS Teams, an application called Lists was used to create a database. It contains a real time record of activities and removed the need for multiple excel documents. The record is owned by service heads and administered by the PMO. It contains full audit trails and can also be used for other reports and as a document storage with attachments. The improved data is used to create a range of corporate dashboards. Since this proof-of-concept work, Lists are now used in a similar way for corporate risk management.

Data quality remains an important focus and teams spend a lot of time on data cleansing. Councils attending the round tables reflect that it can be a challenge to engage with managers/officers on the importance of data quality. Data policies and strategies and roles like chief data officer are important devices to strengthen this focus. In some councils there are clearly identified roles and responsibilities to help with this.

Many councils who attended the panels were using the LGA's [local government data maturity self-assessment tool](#) to review and improve their data maturity. A robust data maturity assessment is regarded as a key driver to produce a data strategy. Data strategies were seen by attendees as essential to articulate vision and priorities, deliverables and investment in functions such as information management and governance. However, in many cases ambitions are curtailed by lack of resources.

Power BI is used by many councils as a visualisation tool, allowing more dynamic planning, reporting and productive performance conversations at all levels. Panel attendees reported that it has good functionality for different types and levels of reporting. Many performance management teams confirmed that there is a high demand for bespoke reports from services; whilst positive in terms of engagement, this can cause challenges around capacity and governance. It is also important to ensure reports are developed in close collaboration with services to ensure they truly meet user's needs.

Data skills generally and Power BI skills in particular are increasingly important. Some councils, particularly with small performance management teams, find it challenging 'to know where to start'. Many report that it requires individuals with aptitude and curiosity who can figure things out and teach themselves. Some councils use more structured support through consultancy. They report that whilst external technical skills are useful when there is a bespoke technical brief, the use of consultants can be expensive and challenging, particularly when the commissioner doesn't understand the art of the possible and where systems and practice continuously evolve.

Many councils draw on free learning and support and several councils are making use of the apprenticeship levy to improve data skills more generally. Some councils have created internal networks or 'communities of practice' approaches to using business intelligence or geographic information systems. The LGA also provides a range of [Power BI masterclasses](#).

Councils attending the panels felt that new technologies are turning the focus to be on business intelligence insights rather than performance reporting. This requires a shift in capacity and the journey, skills and mindset of staff to become more like analysts and less like performance reporters.

## Benchmarking and public reporting

Many participants were engaged in benchmarking as a means to compare performance against the sector generally and 'near neighbours' in particular, and many draw on [LG Inform](#) and [LG Inform Value for Money](#) as the sector's own free benchmarking tools.

In one case the [LG Inform Plus API](#) enabled the council to develop real time comparable benchmarking information that supported significant service improvement in children's services. Other councils were using the LG Inform Plus API to provide real time benchmarking data to the public.

Some councils use benchmarking data in a contextual way, together with other socio-economic and environmental data. The purpose is to create a wider story and context to enable operational review, challenge and learning.

Public reporting is variable across participating councils. Transparency is a key priority for some councils who provide interactive performance dashboards or reporting tools (such as Power BI) for the public to review performance by council plan priority or service area.

For many of those who attended the panels, public reporting was limited to quarterly performance reports to cabinet, committees and/or overview and scrutiny. Some councils also have dedicated webpages that regularly report against council plans.

There was a view that striking the right balance between clear and simple reporting that is fully accessible and the technical capabilities of interactive dashboards that have the capacity to provide very detailed information is important. Achieving the right balance should be determined by comprehensive engagement with report users

throughout the design and build process and once the dashboards are live, as well as by the views, ambitions and preferences of elected members. It is also important to consider data access, security and information governance.

### **Example: Cheshire West and Chester Council**

Cheshire West and Chester have produced a suite of reports, all of which are publicly available:

- [Borough Plan](#) – the strategic plan for the borough – setting out seven missions
- [Annual Delivery Plan \(ADP\)](#) – twelve-month forward plan of the measures and actions set out against the missions within the borough plan
- [State of the Borough](#) – contextual data describing the socio-economic, health and environmental position of the borough
- [Interactive Performance Dashboard](#) – the council's overall approach to the performance management of services and missions
- [Corporate Performance Report \(CPR\)](#) (agenda item 14) – regular report to committees that monitors progress against the ADP.

A [fuller case study](#) of Cheshire West and Chester's approach to performance management is also available.



**Local Government Association**

18 Smith Square

London SW1P 3HZ

Telephone 020 7664 3000

Fax 020 7664 3030

Email [info@local.gov.uk](mailto:info@local.gov.uk)

[www.local.gov.uk](http://www.local.gov.uk)

© Local Government Association, August 2025