

# Using performance networks in the national frameworks across the devolved governments

To: All APSE contacts

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## 1 Introduction

Set up to support the development of the statutory duty of 'Best Value', APSE Performance Networks has been engaged in benchmarking frontline service performance, across the UK, for over 27 years. The service offers robust and well-established processes to collect, validate and report on data. The model meets industry standards in data and benchmarking by ensuring data assessment and analysis is based on consistency, reliability and effective systems of error checking.

Benchmarking takes place with over 170 local authorities UK-wide, collecting annual performance data and using well-established reporting processes to produce comparative reports. The model is reliable and trusted by local government as a source of performance data and is updated each year through working groups comprised of local authority representatives delivering local services to local communities.

Recent guidance issued by the relevant assemblies and governments emphasise the importance of assessing performance and benchmarking not only in terms of evaluating service performance but also in assessing Best Value.

## 2 Demonstrating Best Value

There has been an unprecedented challenge facing councils throughout the UK in both managing reductions in funding as well as a greater demand for public services. The Institute for Government and CIPFA noted (Hoddinott S., Fright M. and Pope T., October 2022, Institute for Government and CIPFA, "Austerity' in public services: Lessons from the 2010s. IFG Insight.):

*"Public services are in a much more fragile position now than in 2010. This is a result of both the first round of austerity and more recently the pandemic. Cuts are therefore likely to be both more damaging and harder to deliver."*

Whilst recent settlements that have increased spending on local authority services overall, many frontline services find that they remain significantly below pre-austerity levels, with demand nevertheless increasing. Whilst funding improvements are to be welcomed, alongside commitments to multi-year settlements the fiscal context means that local authorities must remain acutely aware of the ongoing funding pressures. Coupled with this, the recent changes to the funding formula means significant shifts between councils, with some receiving increases in spending and some receiving reductions due to redistributive mechanisms.

The financial problems of local authorities are well documented. The Local Government Association states that if current cost and demand trends continue, by the end of 2028/29 cost and demand pressures would add £21.4 billion to the cost of delivering council services since 2024/25. This is 29.8 per cent in additional service costs. If these new pressures and funding streams are taken into account, councils would face a £1.9 billion gap in 2025/26 rising to £4.0 billion in 2026/27, £6.0 billion in 2027/28, and £8.4 billion in 2028/29 (LGA, Spending Review: Councils could face £8bn funding black hole by 2028/29, 14 February 2025). Therefore, further real cuts in their resources appear totally unrealistic. There was some comfort in the November budget settlement for councils and additional funding for social care, SEND, homelessness and housing delivery as well as maintenance funds such as potholes, however given the limitations of funding settlements the focus on value for money cannot be lifted at a council level.

At the APSE performance networks conference December 2025, CIPFA reported on the following outlook for local government in relation to finances. This includes:

- Backloaded tax rises
- Unprecedented changes in funding creating winners and losers
- More (Exceptional) Financial Support
- Continued growth in taxes raised locally
- Fundamental structural reform with significant costs of transition
- No let up in growth in demand in key services
- Bigger focus on data and benchmarking than ever before
- Vital need for scenario planning

As a result, CIPFA suggested front line services should consider the following:

- What's your baseline?
- Know your numbers!
- Bring service performance and finance together
- Put everything on the table and challenge
- Balance ambition with reality
- Understand your shared risk appetite

Local authorities need to develop innovative and imaginative ways of addressing the funding gap and performance measurement is one means of evidencing the value of services, identifying cost savings, new opportunities for income generation and service improvement, pinpointing potential areas for productivity increases as well as demonstrating best value. Across the UK, public sector performance measurement and management will form the basis of achieving efficiencies and value for money within local government.

### **3 Using performance networks to demonstrate Best Value**

In demonstrating Best Value, APSE performance networks can be used to:

- Identify potential efficiency gains and service improvements by comparing performance levels with services provided by similar authorities.
- Set targets both over time and in comparison, with other similar authorities, through the direction of travel reports, performance reports, performance at a glance reports and performance indicator standings reports.
- Monitor performance across a range of input, process, output and outcome measures. This can be used to set intervention levels and identify standard deviation.
- Identify trends and explain these – for example is a cost increase due to additional investment in the service?
- Review and challenge – setting realistic goals and reviewing these through the involvement of elected members and peers.
- Highlight areas for improvement and identify good performing authorities to learn from.
- Re-evaluate needs and priorities
- Plan and manage resources effectively

### **4 The new national frameworks**

Throughout the UK and its devolved governments, new national frameworks have been (and are being) developed and this section identifies how performance networks can be used to inform national requirements. APSE performance networks is a local performance management tool and was not set up to simply mirror national requirements but to be used as an improvement tool. However, performance networks data can increasingly be used as evidence within national frameworks.

#### **a) England**

In England, APSE Performance Networks have been liaising with the Ministry of Housing,

Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) over the proposed Local Government Outcomes Framework (LGOF). The consultation was launched on 3 July 2025, and framework aims to be a new approach to outcome-based accountability for councils in England designed to empower councils as place leaders. The framework sets 15 outcomes, that Government expects to work with local authorities on, to deliver key national priorities for local people and communities. These will be underpinned by outcome metrics drawing from existing data sources to show how progress will be measured.

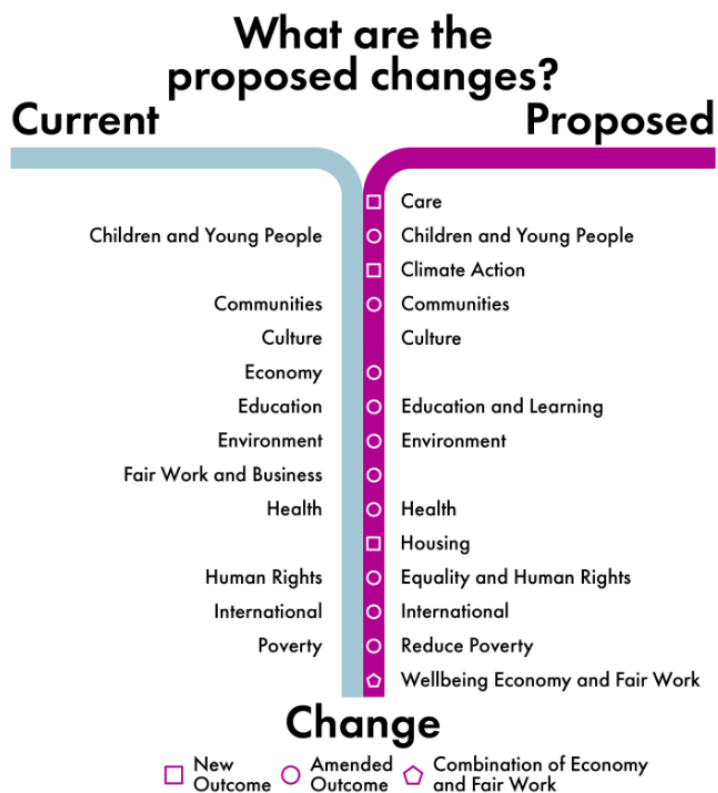
<b>Homelessness and rough sleeping</b>	Prevent and reduce homelessness and rough sleeping
<b>Housing</b>	Everyone has access to a decent, safe, secure, and affordable home
<b>Multiple disadvantage</b>	Improve the lives of adults experiencing multiple disadvantages
<b>Best start in life</b>	Improve early child health, family support and early education to give every child the best start in life
<b>Every child achieving and thriving</b>	Support all children and young people to achieve and thrive in school, at home and in their communities
<b>Keeping children safe and family security (Children's Social Care)</b>	Keep children safe in secure and loving homes and help more families to thrive together
<b>Health and wellbeing</b>	People live healthier lives for longer and health inequalities are reduced
<b>Adult Social Care – Quality</b>	Care users and carers experience high quality adult social care that is provided by a skilled workforce
<b>Adult Social Care – Independence</b>	Care users are supported to stay independent in their homes where possible, and have choice and control over their support
<b>Adult Social Care - Neighbourhood health / integration</b>	Care users are supported by joined up health and social care services at a neighbourhood level
<b>Neighbourhoods</b>	People feel safe and included in their local community and are satisfied with their local area as a place to live
<b>Environment, Circular Economy and climate change</b>	Support a healthier, more resilient natural and built environment, including responding to the risks and impacts of climate change to the benefit of communities
<b>Transport and local infrastructure</b>	Communities are connected with improved, healthier and greener public transport, enabled by well maintained, enhanced and delivered transport infrastructure
<b>Contextual metrics</b>	
<b>Economic prosperity and regeneration</b>	Foster local economic growth and prosperity
<b>Child poverty</b>	Reduce and alleviate child poverty to improve children's lives and life chances

Source: Local Government Outcomes Framework, MHCLG, 2025

APSE performance networks data could be used voluntarily by local authorities to inform the new framework. Given the model was established in response to the introduction of Best Value, and one of the stated purposes of the LGOF is to monitor the Best Value Duty, the consultation by MHCLG provides an opportunity to revisit the value of the benchmarking service. For further details of our response, please [click here](#). The framework is due to be published in 2026.

## **b) Scotland**

Following the latest statutory review of the National Outcomes, the Scottish Government has committed to a period of reform of the [National Performance Framework](#). Work on NPF reform has commenced and APSE will be working with councils in Scotland to ensure performance networks can help them in terms of any new reporting requirements.



## b) Wales

### Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021

Local authority performance requirements:

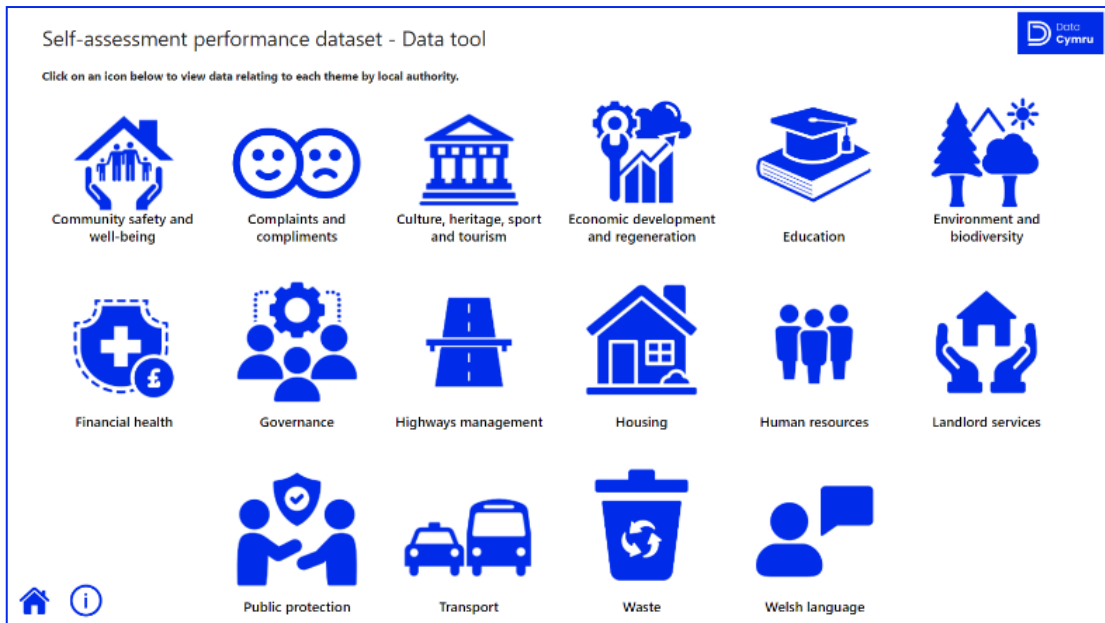
To exercise its functions correctly  
i.e. to ensure the council's functions are successful in producing its stated desired outcomes.

To use its resources economically, efficiently and effectively  
i.e. to ensure the council is using its resources (financial, human, physical and technological) to deliver value for money.

To have effective governance in place to secure the above  
i.e. to ensure their governance arrangements are effective in supporting the achievement of their well-being objectives and value for money.

*"Considering the extent to which the council is meeting the performance requirements is a corporate, organisational assessment rather than an assessment of individual services."*  
 Statutory guidance on Part 6, Chapter 1, of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021

Over the last few years, Data Cymru have been working with local authorities to develop a new performance dataset to support the corporate self-assessment process (which was introduced with the new Local Government and Elections Act 2021). Their aim has been to identify, source and share data to help councils understand, at a corporate level, how they are performing against the performance requirements set out in the Act, and how this performance compares to other councils. To support this, the data is standardised into rates and percentage to allow for meaningful comparisons across Wales.



The resulting self-assessment performance dataset (SAPD) is designed to be a resource for Welsh councils. It is framed around a list of ‘Themes’, which reflect the key functions of a local authority. There is a broader range of data under each of the themes than in previous performance frameworks to allow users to interrogate and better understand their performance. For instance, as well as more traditional outcome related data (measures), context data, resource data, and other quality measures are also included. At the same time, there will be instances where having a high-level overview or ‘snapshot’ of performance will be useful. Therefore, the thematic data is made up of two layers; snapshot data (a small set of outcome focused data (measures) that provide a high-level overview of performance) and supporting data (a wider set of data that provides more detailed information relating to performance).

Alongside the dataset, Data Cymru have also developed an insight tool - Local Authority Performance Profile (LAPP). The tool focuses primarily on the comparative “snapshot” performance data and is designed to help local authorities better understand their individual and relative performance. The Performance Profiles also inform the Panel Performance Assessments (PPAs).

APSE have been liaising with Data Cymru to look at the potential to collaborate to allow local authorities to use performance networks as a data source within the dashboard if they wish to. This will build on previous collaborations with Data Cymru on roads (through CSS Wales) and customer satisfaction surveys.

#### **d) Northern Ireland**

The Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 introduced a duty on each council to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions (paragraph 84), to collect information relating to performance (paragraph 90) and to assess performance in previous financial years and as far as practicable, against the performance of other councils (paragraph 91). APSE have been the lead body working with councils in Northern Ireland to help to fulfil

this duty. More recently, APSE have been liaising with the Local Government Performance Improvement Working Group in Northern Ireland to meet their national reporting requirements and have developed new Power BI reports on a Core 'priority' indicator set.

This module includes the following corporate and service-specific measures:

- Staff leaving (calendar year) as a percentage of average total staff for financial year
- New starters as a percentage of average total staff for financial year
- Days staff absence per employee – short term
- Days staff absence per employee – long term
- Percentage of staff that have no incidences of sickness absence in the year
- Number of days per employee spent on training
- Percentage customer satisfaction with the overall service provided by the authority
- Net cost of council service per head of population
- Percentage of Stage I complaints rectified within target time (5 days)
- Percentage of Stage II complaints rectified within target time (20 days)
- Percentage change in Greenhouse gas emissions from base year to current financial year
- Number of public / stakeholder users registered to corporate social media per head of population
- The percentage of household waste collected by the district council that is sent for recycling
- Customer satisfaction with parks, open spaces & horticultural services
- Percentage of undisputed creditor invoices paid on time within 10 days
- Percentage of undisputed creditor invoices paid on time within 30 days

## **5 Local government re-organisation**

Many English councils are facing the prospect of re-organisation and the ability to share frontline service data, providing a legacy baseline from which to continually improve services under a new authority, represents a best practice approach to the integration of service delivery. APSE have been working with a steering group to develop a lighter-touch data collection exercise for relevant authorities pre, during and post transition, to aid transformation to the new authorities. This has the following features:

- Provides a high-level of corporate and service specific measures to reduce the data collection effort
- Data can be baselined for the current year, shadow year, vesting day year and post transition
- Provides evidence on the impact of change
- Provides a data bank of expected performance levels for similar sized authorities
- Allows groupings around various filters including population density, urban/rural split, deprivation and service-specific factors
- Covers different aspects of performance including cost, productivity, outputs and outcomes
- Ability to filter on the PI's most important to your council – what are your priorities?

For more information on this new module, please contact [djohns@apse.org.uk](mailto:djohns@apse.org.uk)

## 6 APSE comment

To deliver services effectively, councils need to know where they are, where they are going and how to get there – they need evidence, and decisions need to be grounded in good data not opinions. Data is crucial in our ever-changing world and the need for access to effective data is invaluable.

As W. Edwards Deming stated: ***“Without data, you’re just another person with an opinion.”***

Information and data provide intelligence on how effective any service change is, to establish a starting point and to identify future targets. Performance measurement is also a mechanism to learn how other local authorities are meeting the challenges and the impact that their service delivery model and any operational changes is making to outcomes in terms of cost, quality, productivity and customer satisfaction levels.

APSE performance networks can assist local councils by:

- Demonstrating progression on carbon reduction/ecological actions
- Helping to set a clear baseline on which competitiveness, efficiency and value for money can be measured in a systematic manner.
- Identifying the impact of service changes and interventions for your own local council frontline services and for peers in other local councils
- Assessing the impact of re-organisation through monitoring performance pre, during and post transition.
- Assessing the quality, cost and competitiveness of the services that councils provide on a regular basis.
- Helping to report data in meaningful ways to both councillors and the public.
- Identifying direction of travel and pace of change relating to service delivery.
- Identifying inefficiencies such as poor productivity and high cost.
- Supporting service improvement through process benchmarking and sharing best practice examples.

As local authorities increasingly seek to innovate in frontline service delivery the use of a benchmarking system can identify the ability to secure real improvements and savings in time and resources. For example, tracking data and performance before and after the introduction of an AI supported delivery system would allow effective tracking to demonstrate the return on investment. Moreover, collaboration with other councils when entering an improvement journey avoids repeating mistakes and sharing in the workarounds and lessons learned. It goes without saying that scalability of savings can also be identified by benchmarking groups and data.

Robust performance measurement tools are increasingly being recognised as evidence within devolved national frameworks, to demonstrate transparency and accountability. As a result, systems that have been developed and refined over the years by local authorities such as [APSE performance networks](#) will continue to be an invaluable tool. To obtain further details on performance networks, please email [djohns@apse.org.uk](mailto:djohns@apse.org.uk)

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## Sign up for APSE membership to enjoy a whole range of benefits

APSE member authorities have access to a range of membership resources to assist in delivering council services. This includes our regular networks, specifically designed to bring together elected members, directors, managers and heads of service, together with trade union representatives to discuss service specific issues, innovation and new ways of delivering continuous improvement. The networks are an excellent forum for sharing ideas and discussing topical service issues with colleagues from other councils throughout the UK.

APSE networks are a free service included as part of your authority's membership of APSE and are an excellent way to network with peers in other councils. If you do not currently receive details about APSE networks and would like to be added to our list of contacts for your service area, please email [enquiries@apse.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@apse.org.uk).

Our national networks include:

- Building Cleaning and Facilities Management
- Education Catering
- Cemeteries and Crematoria
- Climate Change and Renewables Network
- Housing, Construction and Building Maintenance
- Social Value, Procurement and Commercialisation Network
- Parks, Horticulture and Grounds Maintenance
- Highways and Street Lighting
- Sports and Leisure Management
- Fleet, Transport and Vehicle Maintenance
- Waste Management, Refuse Collection and Street Cleansing
- Veterans and Military Champions Network
- Local Government Reorganisation Network

Visit [www.apse.org.uk](http://www.apse.org.uk) for more details.



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