

## PART ONE - PUBLIC

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<b>Decision Maker:</b>	Executive		
<b>Date:</b>	20 September 2023		
<b>Decision Type:</b>	Non-Urgent	Non-Executive	Non-Key
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Office for Local Government and the Local Authority Data Explorer</b>		
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Naheed Chaudhry, Assistant Director Strategy, Performance and Corporate Transformation Tel: 02084617554 E-mail: naheed.chaudhry@bromley.gov.uk		
<b>Chief Officer:</b>	Ade Adetosoye CBE, Chief Executive		
<b>Ward:</b>	All		

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1. Reason for decision/report and options

- 1.1 This report provides a briefing on the new Office for Local Government, its intended purpose and planned activity. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) established the Office for Local Government (Oflog) in July 2023.
- 1.2 In launching Oflog, DLUHC reference Local Councils as critical partner in the Government's objective to 'level up'. Acknowledging that there is no shared view of what 'good performance looks like' in local government Oflog will address this by "improving access to data, increasing transparency and fostering accountability – while also highlighting excellence and showcasing success."
- 1.3 DLUHC have emphasised that Oflog is not a replacement for the withdrawn Audit Commission. Oflog will not produce performance league tables; nor will add new responsibilities on local authorities. Instead Oflog will recognise and celebrate councils, so others can learn from them. It will also start to detect local authorities at risk of potential failure earlier in the process of decline. Where local authorities are identified as 'at risk of failure', Oflog will convene dialogues between councils and expert local leaders to explore the issues in more detail.

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2. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- A. Note the establishment of the Office for Local Government
- B. Note the initial key metrics launched to monitor the effectiveness of local authorities
- C. Note Bromley's relatively good performance against all 18 metrics
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### Impact on Vulnerable Adults and Children

1. Summary of Impact: Emerging DLUCH oversight on services for vulnerable adults and children.
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### Transformation Policy

1. Policy Status: Not Applicable:
  2. Making Bromley Even Better Priority:  
(5) To manage our resources well, providing value for money, and efficient and effective services for Bromley's residents.
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### Financial

1. Cost of proposal: Not Applicable:
  2. Ongoing costs: Not Applicable:
  3. Budget head/performance centre:
  4. Total current budget for this head: £
  5. Source of funding:
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### Personnel

1. Number of staff (current and additional):
  2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours:
- 

### Legal

1. Legal Requirement: Statutory Requirement Further Details Data sets derived from statutory returns.
  2. Call-in: Not Applicable:
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### Procurement

1. Summary of Procurement Implications: None
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### Property

1. Summary of Property Implications: None
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### Carbon Reduction and Social Value

1. Summary of Carbon Reduction/Sustainability Implications: None
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### Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users or customers (current and projected):
- 

### Ward Councillor Views

1. Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments? Not Applicable

### 3. COMMENTARY

- 3.1 DLUHC state that in recent years a small but significant number of local authority governance and financial failures have directly impacted local communities. At a time when central government is increasingly devolving more power there is a need to have appropriate checks and balances in place. Oflog will play a significant role in establishing a stronger accountability framework, including identifying and supporting at-risk councils
- 3.2 **By publishing existing data about the relative performance of councils**, Oflog will help councillors and the public have the information they need to scrutinise more effectively local decisions. It is suggested that updates to Oflog data-outturns will continue to be inline with existing statutory collection timeframes.
- 3.3 Oflog's strategic objectives are to:
- empower citizens with information about their local authority, enabling them to hold local leaders to account;
  - increase local leaders' and councils' understanding of their relative performance, supporting them to improve and better innovate;
  - increase central government's understanding of local government performance, highlighting excellence and identifying risk of failure to facilitate timely and targeted support.
- 3.4 Oflog's activities will include:
- presenting data on local government performance in a clear and accessible way;
  - celebrating the success of high-performing local authorities, and helping others to learn lessons from them;
  - identifying local authorities at risk of potential failure, and helping to arrange support for them
- 3.5 **Local Authority Data Explorer**
- 3.6 Oflog will improve the transparency of local government performance by publishing data on a new [Local Authority Data Explorer](#) website.
- 3.7 The Data Explorer brings together **existing data** that is often disparate, it initially includes a subset of metrics covering four areas;
- adult social care,
  - waste management,
  - finance, and
  - adult skills (although this area is not applicable to Bromley, see explanation).
- 3.8 **Further service areas will be added to cover a more holistic range of local government responsibilities, and existing areas expanded**, as the metrics are developed.
- 3.9 Oflog acknowledge that data alone does not provide the full answer but will **use it to prompt questions about a local authority's performance**. While there is no particular dataset that can give a definitive prediction of the risk of failure, Oflog will monitor risk through the consideration of 'soft' indicators, which may not adhere to a rigorous analytical criterion but can provide some insight and proxy inference.
- 3.10 By selecting and publishing metrics that are most relevant to devolved areas, Oflog aims to demonstrate the impact of devolution against outcomes that people care about. Oflog seeks to make sure that the outcome metrics used are the most appropriate for holding devolved areas

and their leaders to account for their performance. Some metrics will therefore not be relevant to London local authorities.

3.11 **In seeking to identify at-risk areas, Oflog will not be making any judgement of failure that necessitates formal intervention. This role remains with DLUHC through the existing Best Value framework.** Instead, Oflog's role will be to monitor the indicators – which could include areas such as governance and use them to inform whether a dialogue needs to be opened with any such local authority. If so, Oflog may convene this conversation, bringing in local leaders and experts from the sector to explore what is happening on the ground and whether the indicators are correct in giving an early warning that something is amiss. Oflog will also explore whether the council is already taking action to address the underlying causes, and how effective this action is being.

3.12 Alongside this work conducted by Oflog, DLUHC has consulted on new statutory guidance for Best Value standards and intervention. Oflog's objective to increase transparency of data across the sector are proposed to strengthen the department's Best Value judgements of local councils. Together, the Best Value guidance and Oflog will introduce greater accountability of local government, both to the public and central government.

### 3.13 The Oflog Metrics

3.14 As of July 2023, there are 18 metrics relevant to the London Borough of Bromley. We are performing well against all eighteen as at 2021-22 (the latest published data) when compared to CIPFA benchmark boroughs, National averages and other London Authorities. See appendix for London benchmarks.

3.15 DLUHC undertook some engagement with the sector, where concerns were raised regarding the usefulness of the chosen metrics. Without wider contextual data, the Oflog metrics might provide an overly simplistic view of provision between councils. It is also clear that individual local authorities lack the direct levers to influence some of these indicators.

### 3.16 Adult social care

3.17 Bromley is performing well against National and CIPFA benchmarks in all seven adult social care indicators.

Indicator (click for source data)	Financial year	Value Range	Bromley	Median of Bromley's CIPFA Nearest Neighbours	England median
<a href="#">Requests resulting in a service</a>	2021-22		1078 per 100,000 population	1560 per 100,000 population	1709 per 100,000 population
<a href="#">Workforce turnover rate</a>	2021-22		25.6%	26.8%	28.7%
<a href="#">People in adult social care quality of life</a>	2021-22	-0.8 to 1.0	0.423	0.408	0.409
<a href="#">Carers of people in adult social care quality of life</a>	2021-22	0 to 12	7.7	7.0	7.2
<a href="#">Short term service provision</a>	2021-22		96.0%	79.7%	76.3%
<a href="#">People who use services who found it easy to find information</a>	2021-22		67.2%	65.7%	65.3%
<a href="#">Carers who found it easy to find information about services</a>	2021-22		58.4%	53.5%	57.3%

3.18 Its worth noting that a new CQC led inspection regime for Adult Social Care (ASC) launched this year which involves the collection of evidence against six categories, including people's experiences, feedback from staff/leaders, observations of care, feedback from partners, processes and outcomes of care. It is unclear how the Oflog metrics will add to the depth of

understanding about the experience of care in a local authority area given CQC has explicitly named people's experience and outcomes of care as evidence to be considered.

### 3.19 **Adult Skills**

3.20 This subset is not applicable for the London Borough of Bromley.

3.21 Adult skills comprise a range of education services for adults that support individual learning and progression of workplace skills, as well as economic growth.

3.22 Oflog presents selected performance metrics for adult skills services delivered by Mayoral Combined Authorities only. Individual local authorities lack the direct levers to influence these indicators.

3.23 London boroughs receive funding as Adult Community Education providers from the GLA and then deliver adult community learning locally. But they are often one of many providers – the majority of the Adult Education Budget (AEB) goes to colleges directly, as well as some going to Independent Training Providers.

### 3.24 **Waste**

3.25 Bromley is performing well against National and CIPFA benchmarks in all three waste indicators.

Indicator (click for source data)	Financial year	Bromley	Median of Bromley's CIPFA Nearest Neighbours	England median
<a href="#">Household waste recycling rate</a>	2021-22	48.7%	38.4%	41.9%
<a href="#">Residual household waste</a>	2021-22	464.9 kg per household	544.8 kg per household	502.4 kg per household
<a href="#">Recycling contamination rate</a>	2021-22	5.2%	4.4%	5.6%

3.26 Contextually it's worth noting that London and other dense urban areas face some specific challenges to increasing recycling rates.

3.27 WRAP's recycling tracker survey shows places with the following characteristics are more likely to dispose of items wrongly:

- **Renting:** London has the highest % rented privately or in the social rented sector (55%), the England average is 39%
- Higher levels of **deprivation:** a quarter of all the most deprived households in England (those that are deprived on all four dimensions in the 2021 Census) are in London
- **Flats/apartments** (especially with shared bins): in London in 2021, 54% lived in a flat, maisonette or apartment compared to 17% across the rest of England
- **Young adults:** Those aged 18-34 year olds are less likely to/be persuaded to, recycle (this age group represents 27% of London's population compared with 21% outside of London)
- **Garden waste:** recycling is 6% of total waste in London compared to 17% for England. So, recycling rates for dense urban environments are unlikely to ever reach kerbside levels.

### 3.28 **Local Authority Reserves**

- 3.29 Bromley is performing well against National and CIPFA benchmarks in five of the eight 'local Authority reserves' indicators which are performance metrics. The other 3 metrics are expenditure values, in which Bromley is spending less per dwelling, and has lower rates of council tax against Band D properties and is raising greater levels of council tax, arguable all good indications.
- 3.30 The reserves measures rely on data from the Revenue Outturns collected by DLUHC annually, use a combined measure of unallocated reserves and earmarked reserves excluding those for schools, and public health.
- 3.31 Using net current expenditure and an adjusted measure of service expenditure as the denominators to work out reserves as a % share of spending. Both these spending measures are net of locally generated income (sales, fees & charges and other service income) which London boroughs are more reliant on than other areas. Boroughs will determine reserves levels based on the associated risks to their total (gross) budgets, which partly explain why reserves as a share of net spending appear higher for London boroughs compared with other areas. When you compare reserves as a share of gross spending, boroughs' reserves are around the England average and are lower than those held by councils in shire areas.
- 3.32 More broadly, all councils are different and hold reserves for many different reasons subject to their local context. For example relating to capital programmes, regeneration projects and the different approaches to service delivery down to local democratic decisions. They face different risks relating to their income profiles and the relative volatility of different funding streams. These general reserve measures should therefore be viewed with caution when benchmarking between authorities and across different authority types and areas.

Indicator (click for source data)	Financial year	Bromley	Median of Bromley's CIPFA Nearest Neighbours	England median (Unitary Metropolitan and London Boroughs)
<a href="#">Non-ringfenced reserves as percentage of net revenue expenditure</a>	2021-22	109.0%	49.6%	54.9%
<a href="#">Non-ringfenced reserves as percentage of service spend</a>	2021-22	84.3%	42.7%	44.6%
<a href="#">Total core spending power per dwelling</a>	2021-22	£1625.67	£1921.97	£1885.14
<a href="#">Level of Band D council tax rates</a>	2021-22	£1327.86	£1457.44	£1554.02
<a href="#">Council tax revenue per dwelling</a>	2021-22	£1606.37	£1546.62	£1293.42
<a href="#">Social care spend as percentage of core spending power</a>	2021-22	65.2%	63.9%	66.4%
<a href="#">Debt servicing as percentage of core spending power</a>	2021-22	0.5%	9.6%	9.0%
<a href="#">Total debt as percentage of core spending power</a>	2021-22	10.6%	249.7%	226.8%

### 3.33 Best value consultation

- 3.34 The consultation sort views on statutory guidance for local authorities, on the Best Value Duty. Issued to local authorities in England under section 26 of the Local Government Act 1999. The guidance provides greater clarity to the local government sector on how to fulfil the Best Value Duty by describing what constitutes best value, the standards expected by the department and the models of intervention at the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities' disposal in the event of failure to uphold these standards.
- 3.35 The consultation closed on 15<sup>th</sup> August 2023 with findings expected this autumn. [Best value standards and intervention - a statutory guide for best value authorities: consultation - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/best-value-standards-and-intervention-a-statutory-guide-for-best-value-authorities)
- 3.36 Appendix: London Councils, benchmarking against all London LAS and London average.