

Response from the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman to the call for written evidence from the Local Government and Regeneration Committee on the Local Government Benchmarking Framework.

Our general comments relate to the consideration of benchmarking more widely within the Local Government sector, than to the specific role of the Local Government Benchmarking Framework.

We understand that the core purpose of the Local Government Benchmarking Framework is to develop, on a collaborative basis, a comparative benchmarking framework for Scottish Local Government that supports the targeting of improvement activities and resources to areas of greatest impact in terms of efficiency/costs, productivity and outcomes. In doing so, the Benchmarking Framework considers a number of high level indicators to identify a small number of 'headline' measures.

By contrast, the Local Authority Complaints Network currently uses detailed complaints handling performance information provided by all 32 councils to compare, contrast and benchmark performance. In its most recent benchmarking of performance for the year 2014-15, the Complaints Network worked closely with the Improvement Service to further benchmark performances for improvement by considering additional factors, such as urban, rural and in relation to socio-economics, and how these may be used to better understand complaint performance. This approach has helped complaints handlers, managers and senior officers in Local Government to:

- better understand their own performance by sharing and learning from other councils,
- identify where, and why councils performance varies,
- use that learning to improve their own complaints handling performance, and
- identify and share good practice across all 32 councils.

As members of the Local Government Complaints Handlers Network, we are aware of the good work in relation to benchmarking that is undertaken by this group. The performance data it considers is detailed and, therefore, appropriate in the operational context of managing complaints, rather than being appropriate in the high level suite of indicators as used by the Local Government Benchmarking Framework.

The Local Authority Complaints Handlers Network benchmarking outputs add value in an operational context for individual local authorities. They provide useful information for use through annual audits and self-assessment. The complaints handlers network provides an excellent forum for benchmarking at an operational level.

Our view is that there would be benefit in having appropriate governance arrangements in place to allow the Local Authority Complaint Handlers Network outputs to be considered at a strategic level by the sector, possibly by SOLACE as part of their consideration of wider benchmarking indicators.