

Committee: PERFORMANCE SELECT COMMITTEE
Date: 13 November 2008
Title: BENCHMARKING REPORT
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Agenda Item

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Item for
information

Summary

1. This Benchmarking report presents a summary of performance data for the SPARSE quartile positioning of a selection of Best Value Performance Indicators collected by the Council during 2007/08, together with an overview of the PI Benchmarking service offered by Covalent.

Recommendations

2. That the Committee review and comment on the 2007/08 SPARSE quartile performance analysis.
3. That the Committee review and consider the potential benchmarking opportunities provided by the Covalent Benchmarking Module.

Background Papers

4. The following papers were referred to by the author in the preparation of the report:
 - SPARSE Performance Profiling Service documentation
 - Covalent PI Benchmarking Service brochure
 - Performance Improvement Team internal files 2008

Impact

Communication/Consultation	Communication on performance is carried out via Utterings, Uttlesford Life and specific service briefings
Community Safety	None
Equalities	None
Finance	Performance Improvement Plans cover any additional funding associated with recovery of performance
Human Rights	None
Legal implications	The Audit Commission's focus on data quality will require consideration and quality assurance controls
Sustainability	No direct impact resulting from report findings

SITUATION

SPARSE Benchmarking




5. As members of SPARSE (a special interest group of the LGA, comprising the most rural local authorities in England) UDC take part in an annual benchmarking exercise to compare performance against other SPARSE authorities (approximately 90 in total) for a basket of key indicators (includes several benefits, corporate health, planning and refuse collection indicators).
6. The resultant SPARSE report contains data for all member authorities broken down by Best Value Performance Indicator. It identifies top and bottom quartile data for each of the Indicators.
7. Whilst the data employed by SPARSE to underpin this benchmarking exercise is unaudited, it does provide an early indication of how the Council has performed on a number of key performance indicators in comparison to other SPARSE authorities.
8. A year-on-year comparison (06/07 vs. 07/08) of the end of year quartile positions has been completed for each of the SPARSE Performance Indicators. It should be noted however, that whereas the 2006/07 data has been audited by the Audit Commission the 2007/08 data has not (the anticipated release date of the audited 2007/08 data is December 2008).

Report

9. This report presents SPARSE quartile performance data for 2007/08 and compares it against SPARSE data for 2006/07.








Statistics




10. Quartile Analysis

Quartile Position		2006/07 No. of PI's	%	2007/08 No. of PI's	%
Top		6	32%	9	47%
Bottom		5	26%	3	16%
Neither		8	42%	7	37%
Total No. of PI's		19		19	





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A direct comparison of 2006/07 and 2007/08 quartile positions can be made for 19 BVPI's. The results are as follows:

Positive Movement 				
Quartile Position 2006/07	Quartile Position 2007/08	No. of BVPI's	%	PI Details
		1		BV204 – The number of planning appeal decisions allowed against the authority's decision to refuse on planning applications, as a percentage of the total number of planning appeals against refusals of planning applications
		3		BV109a - Major applications determined in 13 weeks BV109b - Minor applications determined in 8 weeks BV109c - 'Other' applications determined in 8 weeks
		2		BV91a – Percentage of households resident in the authority's area served by kerbside collection of recyclables BV91b – Percentage of households resident in the authority's area served by kerbside collection of at least two recyclables
Total		6	31%	

Negative Movement 				
Quartile Position 2006/07	Quartile Position 2007/08	Number of BVPI's	%	PI Details
		2		BV78a – The average processing time taken for all new Housing and Council Tax Benefit (HB/CTB) claims submitted to the local authority, for which the date of decision is within the financial year being reported BV84b – Percentage change from the previous financial year in the number of kilograms of household waste collected per head of the population

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		1		BV78b – The average processing time taken for all written notifications to the local authority of changes to a claimant’s circumstance that require a new decision on behalf of the authority
		0		
Total		3	16%	

Unchanged Movement 				
Quartile Position 2006/07	Quartile Position 2007/08	Number of BVPI's	%	PI Details
		4		BV9 - % of Council Tax collected BV10 – % of Non-domestic rates collected BV82ai – Percentage of the total tonnage of household waste arisings which has been recycled BV205 - Quality of Planning Service checklist
		4		BV82b(i) - % of Household Waste Composted BV84a – Number of kilograms of household waste collected per head BV106 – Percentage of new homes built on previously developed land BV12 – Number of working days/shifts lost to the LA due to sickness absence
		2		BV8 – Percentage of invoices for commercial goods and services paid by the Authority within 30 days of receipt or within the agreed payment terms BV86 – Cost of waste collection per household
Total		10	53%	

SPARSE Performance Summary

11. To summarise, when comparing performance of the 19 SPARSE indicators year-on-year i.e. 06/07 vs. 07/08, there has been an overall increase in performance. The number of indicators achieving top quartile performance has increased by 15%, whilst the number of indicators in the bottom quartile has decreased by 10%.

Covalent PI Benchmarking Module

12. Covalent provide a PI Benchmarking service employing comparator benchmarks derived from Covalent customers' PI values. The service provides customers with 'real-time' benchmark values rather than waiting for 'out of date' Audit Commission data.
13. Each month the Covalent Benchmarking module consolidates activated data values for all National Indicators for each customer recording values against that PI. This data is employed to calculate the quartile value for each of the Covalent benchmark types. The actual values for each individual customer are not disclosed, just the aggregate value for each quartile together with a list of customers that have provided the data.
14. The resultant benchmark values are uploaded to each subscribing customer's site along with a summary spreadsheet. The benchmark values can be used in trend charts to show how an organisation is performing compared to those in the same benchmark groups.
15. To give an indication of how this module could be of benefit to UDC, Covalent has 65 customers who are councils and of these, 27 are District Councils. Furthermore, 15 of these 27 Councils are SPARSE members. Although the data cannot as yet be broken down into just Districts, District level data does actually account for the majority of the data employed by Covalent for benchmarking purposes.
16. It should be noted that whilst we only have a handful of quarterly reported National Indicators, this module would prove extremely useful at the end of the financial year. Once outturn data has been entered on Covalent we would be able to obtain an indication of our annual performance compared to other similar authorities in a much more timely fashion.
17. Whilst this benchmarking module would not cover our Service and Corporate Indicators, we have carried out further investigations with Covalent and discovered that where other authorities are still collecting data for specific Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI's), this could be incorporated into the benchmarking module. UDC have retained 19 BVPI's this year (as either Corporate or Service Indicators); 9 of these are collected quarterly and the remainder (10) are collected annually. We are exploring whether or not there would be an additional cost associated with this option.

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- 18. Covalent have further advised that it would be possible to set up a bespoke group of 'like' Councils from its customer database (e.g. neighbouring authorities or SPARSE authorities) for us to benchmark against. We would however, need to seek the explicit permission of the other authorities whose data we would be benchmarking against.
- 19. The cost for the benchmarking module is £500 per year on a subscription basis. The setting up of any bespoke benchmarking groups would incur an additional cost, the exact amount being dependent upon the complexity of the work involved.
- 20. Following discussions with our Covalent Account Manager a 2 month trial of the Benchmarking Module has been negotiated (for November and December 2008) at no expense to UDC.

Risk Analysis

The following have been assessed as the potential risks associated with this issue:

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
That PI's will not meet SPARSE top quartile position requirements	1	3	<p>Performance is considered and commented on by SMB on a quarterly basis.</p> <p>Performance Select Committee will focus on corporate performance issues.</p> <p>Benchmarking will be continually conducted against other SPARSE authorities.</p>