



26 October 2023

Dear Chief Executive,

Next steps for Oflog and new draft metrics

I am writing primarily to seek your views on the next set of draft metrics for our Local Authority Data Explorer. But I also wanted to take the opportunity to give you – first – an update on our thinking about overall next steps for the Office for Local Government (Oflog).

Next steps for Oflog

There is an ambitious vision for Oflog in the long term set out in the government's [policy document](#). As a small and new organisation, we need to choose what to prioritise in the short term.

Lord Morse (the interim Chair) and I have met a number of you to discuss what you think Oflog should prioritise. We have not yet met all of you, but we are making sure that everyone has an opportunity to meet us if you would like. I am holding a session with each regional grouping of chief executives this Autumn. We are extremely grateful for your time and input.

We want to focus for now on two problems that sector colleagues have told us about.

First: the rate of serious governance and financial failures in local authorities is low, but it has increased. You have told us that you share our desire to ensure that warning signs of potential serious failure are spotted and addressed as early as possible.

Second: many of you have told us that, even though your own local authority is performing well, you worry you are missing opportunities to make it even better. In particular, a number of you said that your organisation spends less time than you would like learning from other local authorities, and that you fear you are not making the best possible use of data.

To tackle the first problem, we want to find new ways to spot and address early warning signs of potential failure. We want to do this in a way that complements, not duplicates, the work of DLUHC, the LGA and others. Our thinking on how best to do this is still developing.

To tackle the second problem – of missed opportunities for organisational improvement – we are considering a range of options. In the short term, over the coming months, we plan to organise some targeted webinars – involving small groups of local authorities with similar characteristics – to share experiences and approaches to delivering particular services. In the

longer term, as we get more capacity, we hope to extend to offering new analytical insights and reports on good practice, and expert support to help you use data to improve performance. We will want to work closely with other organisations offering such support so that we complement, not duplicate.

In parallel, we want to continue to build the Data Explorer. The ultimate objective is for this to be a focused dashboard that gives you, your colleagues and citizens an easy way to compare data on your local authority to data on similar authorities. This should serve as a useful prompt for you and your organisations to identify potential areas for improvement, and which other authorities you might want to contact to share experiences and approaches. It should also help citizens and civil society to ask the right questions.

However, we are clear that data alone is rarely enough to assess a local authority's performance and often needs context via further investigation, including talking to people who understand the local area. We want to do more to make that clear to all users of the Data Explorer – both citizens and the media – so that they do not over-interpret the data we publish.

In response to feedback from the sector since our launch, I want to clarify some other points about how we are building the Data Explorer:

- We are developing it in stages. We added four service areas in July; we are planning to add another five in the next tranche; and to cover the whole scope of local government's role we will need more than 20 service areas in total (see Annex B below).
- We think it is right that the Data Explorer will include a mixture of outputs (clearly attributable to council performance – e.g. speed of planning decisions); outcomes (less wholly attributable – e.g. housing supply); and relevant context (e.g. spending power).
- We are working hard to identify the most useful set of metrics for each service area, but we know that we won't always get it right first time. After we add each new tranche of metrics, they will remain open to ongoing challenge and revision.
- We are continually looking for ways to improve the usability of the Data Explorer. For example, in response to feedback from some of you, we have changed the way we display data about county councils. Please keep giving us your thoughts.
- We have heard loud and clear that you would like more opportunities to see and comment on draft metrics before they are put onto the Data Explorer. That is the main purpose of this letter today.

I also encourage you to note that:

- We have updated the nearest neighbour data on the tool to reflect CIPFA's latest model, so the councils listed as your nearest neighbours have probably changed.
- The media are starting to use the Data Explorer in their reporting, especially on financial data. Given this, I need not remind you that it is as important as ever that you ensure the accuracy of your data returns.

Draft metrics for comment

As we develop the next set of metrics for the Data Explorer, we have made two key improvements to the way we engage with you:

1. We are sharing the draft list of new metrics. They are set out in Annex A of this letter. We welcome your comments on them. I want to stress that this list is genuinely only a draft: we very much want your feedback on how these metrics could be improved or augmented. We would also like your thoughts on what we should include in the explanatory notes for each metric (including relevant context that users of the Data Explorer should consider); we have included here some initial reflections on what those notes might need to say, but not a full draft. Please submit any written comments and suggestions by **close 22 November 2023**. Your feedback should be sent directly to Oflog@levellingup.gov.uk.
2. To complement seeking your views in writing, we will also be holding open-invite workshops in November. These collaborative events will allow discussion on the possible metrics within each area in more detail. We ask that attendees should have sufficient expertise in the relevant service or department to engage actively in discussion on the metrics. To participate in a workshop, please could you or your nominee sign up using the relevant form **three working days prior to the workshop**.

Workshop topic	Date & Time	Sign up link
Mayoral Combined Authorities (covering Business and Economic Growth, and Roads)	Wednesday 15 November, 10.30-12.00	MCA Business & Economic Growth and Roads
Roads	Tuesday 7 November, 11.30-13.00	Roads
Business and Economic Growth	Wednesday 8 November, 14.00-15.30	Business & Economic Growth
Waste Management (fly-tipping)	Thursday 9 November, 14.30-16.00	Waste Management (fly-tipping)
Corporate and Finance	Tuesday 14 November, 10.30-12.00	Corporate & Finance
Planning	Thursday 16 November, 10.30-12.00	Planning

We don't want to create unnecessary new burdens, so we're looking for existing data which is already published England-wide, rather than suggestions for future new data collections. Metrics should capture key elements of local authority responsibilities where councils have significant powers to influence outcomes, be measurable at a local authority level, and not significantly duplicate other metrics proposed for the Data Explorer. The metrics themselves should be measurable over time and show meaningful differences between authorities.

We are also sharing future service areas that we think we should add to the Data Explorer in future, after this next tranche. These are set out in Annex B of this letter. We would welcome your comments on whether these are the right service areas.

We hope this new process of engagement works. If you don't think it does, please let us know by emailing Oflog@levellingup.gov.uk.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Josh Goodman". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly informal style.

Josh Goodman
Interim Chief Executive

Annex A – Draft List of Metrics

The following metrics have been identified through initial engagement with the respective central government policy-owning departments. In order not to create new burdens, Oflog is solely considering existing data, so all metrics in the below list come from existing national data collections. We are now seeking your input to further iterate this list to something that captures a rounded overview of local authority responsibilities in these areas.

For all metrics already on the Data Explorer we have included an explanatory section which includes any relevant context that users should consider. We would greatly welcome your feedback on what contextual information we should provide on this new set of metrics.

When providing your comments on this list, we would particularly welcome your reflections on the following prompt questions:

1. Do these metrics provide a rounded overview of local authority delivery in the five areas?
 - a. Are there metrics that shouldn't be here? Why should they be omitted?
 - b. Are there important metrics or data sources that we've missed?
2. Do any of the metrics significantly duplicate other metrics in our list? Why?
3. Are these metrics standardised in a way that will allow meaningful comparisons to be made between different local authorities?
4. What key caveats should we mention in our 'about the data' statements to ensure that the data can be properly interpreted?

We're looking for existing data which is already published England-wide, rather than suggestions for future new data collections. Metrics to be included in the Data Explorer should capture key elements of local authority responsibilities where councils have significant powers to influence outcomes, be measurable at a local authority level, and not significantly duplicate other metrics proposed for the Data Explorer. The metrics themselves should be measurable over time and show meaningful differences between authorities.

Local government is unique in having responsibility for a very wide range of services for the public – from services that everyone uses, to services for the most vulnerable, and growing the local economy and making their areas a great place to live. Every service could have a credible claim to being fast-tracked for the Data Explorer. In that context, we have not tried to identify particular priority areas. Instead, we are adding metrics in tranches which are of manageable size; provide coverage of different tiers of local authority; and have an established and stable dataset.

Planning

Planning functions are a key responsibility of local authorities. We want to capture measures of speed and quality, leaning heavily on existing reporting to DLUHC and the current National Planning Policy Framework. We hope that the metrics put forward are already well recognised by the sector. We propose calculating these metrics across a two-year time span to broaden sample size. We are particularly interested in feedback on whether the quantity of applications for counties is sufficient to make metrics (2) and (5) suitable, or whether other calculations may

be more sensible. As you will see in Annex B, we are minded to add both environment and housing as service areas on the Data Explorer in future; when we get to that point, we will consider how best to make clear their links to local authorities' planning functions.

Data for these metrics is collected by DLUHC and the Planning Inspectorate and is published by DLUHC as National Statistics. Major and non-major development decisions cover both residential and commercial developments. Planning applications that have been overturned at appeal include non-determination cases (where a decision was not made in the agreed time) and exclude appeals relating to planning conditions. Source: [Live tables on planning application statistics - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/live-tables-on-planning-application-statistics)

Draft metrics identified for planning are:

1. Percentage of major planning applications decided on time (district matters) [lower tier, unitary authorities, London and metropolitan boroughs]

Authorities have a statutory 13 weeks to make major decisions, but some decisions have an agreed time of 16 weeks if the case involves a planning performance agreement, environmental impact assessment or agreed extension time. Decisions made within the agreed time frame are classified as decided on time and presented in this metric as a % of all major decisions. Data is published quarterly in financial years.

2. Percentage of major planning applications decided on time (county matters) [upper tier, unitary authorities, London and metropolitan boroughs]

Authorities have a statutory 13 weeks to make major decisions, but some decisions have an agreed time of 16 weeks if the case involves a planning performance agreement, environmental impact assessment or agreed extension time. Decisions made within the agreed time frame are classified as decided on time and presented in this metric as a % of all major decisions. Data is published quarterly in financial years.

3. Percentage of non-major planning applications decided on time (district matters) [lower tier, unitary authorities, London and metropolitan boroughs]

Authorities have a statutory 8 weeks to make minor decisions, but this can be extended subject to a performance agreement. Decisions made within the agreed time frame are classified as decided on time and presented in this metric as a % of all non-major decisions. Data is published quarterly in financial years.

4. Percentage of major planning applications overturned on appeal (district matters) [lower tier, unitary authorities, London and metropolitan boroughs]

The metric covers the percentage of planning applications for major development that have been overturned at appeal, once nine months have elapsed following the end of the assessment period. Data is published quarterly. Note that some authorities have missing data

for certain quarters. The department uses a system of imputing values to provide estimates for the missing quarters.

5. Percentage of major planning applications overturned on appeal (county matters) [upper tier, unitary authorities, London and metropolitan boroughs]

The metric covers the percentage of planning applications for major development that have been overturned at appeal, once nine months have elapsed following the end of the assessment period. Data is published quarterly. Note that some authorities have missing data for certain quarters. The department uses a system of imputing values to provide estimates for the missing quarters.

6. Percentage of non-major planning applications overturned on appeal (district matters) [lower tier, unitary authorities, London and metropolitan boroughs]

Data for this metric would be taken from DLUHC's statistical data set, published with the Planning Inspectorate. The metric covers the percentage of planning applications for non-major development that have been overturned at appeal, once nine months have elapsed following the end of the assessment period. Data is published quarterly. Note that some authorities have missing data for certain quarters. The department uses a system of imputing values to provide estimates for the missing quarters.

7. Date when a Local Plan was formally adopted by an authority [lower tier, unitary authorities, London and metropolitan boroughs]

Dates for this metric would be taken from the Planning Inspectorate monitoring reporting of Local Plan progress. Source: [Local Plan: monitoring progress – GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk))

Roads

Local authorities are central to the effective functioning of much of the country's road network. We have identified metrics that highlight councils' role in maintaining roads and delivering road safety outcomes. We envisage expanding this into a broader theme incorporating metrics on public transport at a later stage. We welcome your views on whether the below are the right metrics to represent service outcomes. Are there other significant elements that we should draw out through different or additional metrics? We have considered whether combining metrics 8 and 9 into a single metric covering all roads might be preferable given how highly correlated they are, and would particularly welcome your views on that.

Draft metrics identified for roads are:

8. Percentage of local authority A roads considered for maintenance [upper tier below MCAs, unitary authorities, London and metropolitan boroughs]

Data for this metric would be taken from the DfT official / national statistics publication. This covers the percentage of A roads, as measured in 10 metre sections, where maintenance is

likely to be needed within the next 12 months. Note there are limitations for many London Boroughs particularly, where data for many is missing from 2019 onwards. Source: [Road conditions in England to March 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#).

9. Percentage of local authority B and C roads considered for maintenance [upper tier below MCAs, unitary authorities, London and metropolitan boroughs]

Data for this metric would be taken from the DfT official / national statistics publication. This covers the percentage of B roads and C roads, as measured in 10 metre sections, where maintenance is likely to be needed in the next 12 months. Note there are limitations for London Boroughs particularly, where data is missing for many from 2019 onwards. [Source: Road conditions in England to March 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#).

10. Number of casualties in reported road traffic collisions per billion vehicle miles [upper tier below MCAs, unitary authorities, London and metropolitan boroughs]

Data for this metric would be taken from the DfT published tables. This covers personal injury collisions on public roads which become known to the police within 30 days. Damage-only collisions, with no human casualties, and collisions on private roads or car parks are not included. We recognise that this metric covers both locally and nationally managed roads, but our understanding is that the influence of nationally managed roads is minimal. We would welcome your views on this point. [Source: Reported road collisions, vehicles and casualties tables for Great Britain - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Business and Economic Growth

The Levelling Up White Paper (through its “six capitals”) outlined a range of factors which determine local economic growth. Local authorities are a key partner in driving progress on these factors within their local area. To reflect this crucial role, we propose to include headline metrics from Levelling Up Mission 1 covering productivity, pay and jobs.

In addition to areas such as planning, roads and adult skills, which contribute to local economic growth, we are also proposing to introduce a further set of metrics capturing the extent to which business growth is fostered locally.

From April 2024, the Government expects local and combined authorities to take on the functions currently delivered by Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). These functions include business representation, strategic economic planning, and the delivery of government programmes. LEP responsibilities will transfer to upper tier and unitary authorities where they are not already delivered by a combined authority.

We have identified some suggested metrics to measure the vitality of local enterprise within a local authority. The data for each of the proposed metrics will be presented for upper tier and unitary authority level. Local authority data will also be aggregated to MCA level, where one exists. In line with other publications, we propose standardising the metrics based on the existing business population in each geography, noting that some publications use population

instead. We would welcome views on which is the most appropriate way to ensure the metrics are comparable across geography; we propose standardising by active enterprises. We would also welcome views on which geographical areas are most appropriate to measure.

Draft metrics identified for business and economic growth are:

11. Births of new enterprises [upper tier, unitary authorities, MCAs]

Data for this metric is published by ONS as a statistical bulletin. A business birth is identified as a business that was present in-year, but did not exist in year t-1 or t-2. Data is published in Table 1.1d (count of births of new enterprises for 2021) and should be divided by Table 3.1d (Count of Active Enterprises For 2021) to give a % metric which takes into account difference in local authority sizes. Source: [Business demography, UK Statistical bulletins - Office for National Statistics](#)

12. Deaths of enterprises [upper tier, unitary authorities, MCAs]

Data for this metric is published by ONS as a statistical bulletin. A business death is defined as a business that was on the active file in-year, but was no longer present in the active file in t+1 and t+2. Data is published annually but requires calculation first. Data is published in Table 2.1d (count of deaths of new enterprises for 2021) and should be divided by Table 3.1d (Count Of Active Enterprises For 2021) to give a % metric which takes into account differences in local authority sizes. Source: [Business demography, UK Statistical bulletins - Office for National Statistics](#)

13. Number of high growth enterprises [upper tier, unitary authorities, MCAs]

Data for this metric is published by ONS as a statistical bulletin. High growth enterprises are defined as all enterprises with average annualised growth greater than 20% per annum, over a three-year period. Data is published annually but requires calculation first. Data is published in Table 7.1d (count of high growth enterprises for 2021) and should be divided by Table 3.1d (Count Of Active Enterprises For 2021) to give a % metric which considers difference in local authority sizes. Source: [Business demography, UK Statistical bulletins - Office for National Statistics](#)

14. Gross Value Added (GVA) per hour worked [upper tier, unitary authorities, MCAs]

This metric measures business productivity as an estimate of the volume of goods and services produced, reported as £ per hour worked. Source: [Subregional productivity in the UK – Office for National Statistics](#)

15. Gross median weekly pay (£) [upper tier, unitary authorities, MCAs]

This metric is taken from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, a National Statistics publication. Data has been exported using the Nomis online service, provided by ONS, which

publishes statistics on population, society and the labour market at national, regional and local levels. Source: [Nomis](#)

16. Employment rate for 16-64 years olds [upper tier, unitary authorities, MCAs]

Data for this metric is published by ONS and is based on information gathered by the Labour Force Survey and is a National Statistic. Data is taken from Table L101: Regional labour market: local indicators for counties, local and unitary authorities. [Source: LI01 Regional labour market: local indicators for counties, local and unitary authorities – Office for National Statistics](#)

Corporate and Finance

At launch, the Data Explorer included a small number of financial indicators for upper and lower tiers of local government to help to present relevant context (use of reserves, core spending power, council tax levels and revenue, debt servicing and total debt). Oflog is aware of local authority feedback on how to account for housing revenue account debt in some of these debt related metrics. Given the wider context around debt in the sector, Oflog is committed to ensuring that appropriate metrics are used for this purpose. We will therefore consider recommendations made following the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill Capital Risk Metrics Consultation in Autumn 2023, in response to which the sector has already given extensive feedback. We do not want to replicate or cut across that existing consultation by asking for views again in this process but instead expect to change or add to existing Data Explorer metrics when that process is completed.

The four capital risk metrics proposed in the [LURB consultation](#) were: were:

1. The total of a local authority's debt (including credit arrangements) as compared to the financial resources at the disposal of the authority.
2. The proportion of the total of a local authority's capital assets which is investments made, or held, wholly or mainly in order to generate financial return.
3. The proportion of the total of a local authority's debt (including credit arrangements) in relation to which the counterparty is not central government or a local authority.
4. The amount of minimum revenue provision charged by a local authority to a revenue account for a financial year.

In addition, based on suggestions from our engagement with the sector, we wanted to widen the scope of the contextual indicators beyond purely financial, attempting to capture metrics that can give a sense of how a local authority operates. This would therefore become a theme covering 'Corporate and Finance'. We have found few existing data sources here and, while we would welcome additional suggestions, have proposed including metrics using Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman data. In principle, these metrics are available for all tiers of local government, though there are likely to be many MCAs without many complaints raised making this less useful for that tier.

Other contextual information proposed covers the in-year collection rates for council tax and business rates. These are not intended as performance measures but instead indicators of pressures on income generation. We would expect to exclude data from 2020/21 and 2021/22 due to COVID impacts.

Draft metrics identified for corporate and finance are:

17. Percentage of Ombudsman complaints upheld [all tiers]

Data for this metric is published by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman as datasheets. Complaints are upheld when fault is found in an organisation's actions, including where the organisation accepted fault before they were investigated. The uphold rate is expressed as a percentage of the completed investigations. Data is published annually and should be used for lower tier/districts, upper tier/counties, unitary authorities, and MCAs. Source: [Local government complaint reviews - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman](#)

18. Number of upheld Ombudsman complaints per 10,000 population [all tiers]

This metric uses complaints data published by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and population data published by the Office for National Statistics. Complaints are upheld when fault is found in an organisation's actions, including where the organisation accepted fault before they were investigated. This is then divided by the number of people within an area. Data is published annually and should be used for lower tier/districts, upper tier/counties, unitary authorities, and MCAs. Source: [Local government complaint reviews - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman](#)

19. Council tax collection rates [lower tier, unitary authorities, London and metropolitan boroughs]

Data for this metric is published by DLUHC as National Statistics. Data is collected from local authorities quarterly. Source: [Collection rates for Council Tax and non-domestic rates in England](#)

20. Non-domestic rates collection rates [lower tier, unitary authorities, London boroughs and metropolitan boroughs]

Data for this metric is published by DLUHC as National Statistics. Data is collected from local authorities quarterly. Source: [Collection rates for Council Tax and non-domestic rates in England](#)

Waste management (fly-tipping)

The government's Anti-Social Behaviour Action Plan outlined the government's wish to see a tougher approach on litter, graffiti, and fly-tipping. Local authorities play an important role in tackling this through prevention and enforcement using the range of powers and tools available to them.

We are proposing a series of metrics from DEFRA's [fly-tipping publication](#). These are intended to give a full picture across incidents, fixed penalty notices and all actions. We recognise it is difficult to measure accurately the prevalence of fly-tipping and effective action against fly-tipping using the available data. We would welcome feedback on which are most appropriate. Source: [ENV24 - Fly tipping incidents and actions taken in England](#)

Although fly-tipping is not strictly a waste management matter, we will include it in the Data Explorer under this theme whilst we consider the merits of introducing a specific theme for anti-social behaviour in future tranches.

Draft metrics identified for fly-tipping are:

21. Fly-tipping incidents per 1,000 people

This measure is taken from the fly-tipping statistics published annually by DEFRA.

22. Fly-tipping fixed penalty notices issued per incident

This measure is taken from the recently published League Tables by DEFRA and takes total fixed penalty notices issued within a year, standardised by the number of incidents.

23. Fly-tipping fixed penalty notices issued per 1,000 people

This is an alternative standardisation, using the same method as the incidents data.

24. Fly-tipping fixed penalty notices percent paid

This metric would take the proportion of fixed penalty notices paid divided by those issued within each year.

25. Fly-tipping fixed penalty notices paid per incidents

This metric would standardise fixed penalty notices paid by the number of incidents.

26. Fly-tipping enforcement actions per incident

This metric would combine all enforcement actions, as reported to DEFRA, standardised by the number of incidents.

Annex B: List of future areas considered for inclusion in Oflog's Local Authority Data Explorer

One of Oflog's core priorities is to develop the Local Authority Data Explorer to cover a broad range of service areas that together give an overview of the performance of a local authority. As well as adding new service areas to the Explorer, there will be a programme of reviewing and updating metrics already published.

We are exploring the below areas as part of expanding the Data Explorer in the future. We are sharing it to give you an indication of the future of the Data Explorer as currently planned, and to invite any feedback you may have on the list of areas we've identified.

Initial areas with metrics delivered in July 2023:

- Adult Social Care
- Adult Skills
- Finance
- Waste Management

Areas with metrics currently being shared for comment:

- Business and Economic Growth
- Corporate and Finance
- Planning
- Roads
- Waste Management (fly-tipping)

Areas proposed for development next (subject to change):

- Children's Social Care
- Homelessness and Rough Sleeping
- Public Health
- Youth Justice & Accommodation

Future areas:

- Animal Welfare
- Anti-Social Behaviour
- Asylum Services
- Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation
- Early Years
- Employment Rate
- Environment
- Housing
- Neighbourhood Crime
- Parks and Green Spaces
- Public Transport
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
- Sport, Leisure & Recreational Services (inc. Libraries)
- Support Services for Vulnerable People