



Local Area Research + Intelligence Association

LARIA Newsletter July 2024

LARIA Updates

We have to talk about OFLOG

Jason Lowther - Institute of Local Government Studies (INLOGOV)

It's been an exciting month in government, nationally and locally, since the General Election on 4th July. As the new Labour administration finds its feet, somewhere on Minister's "to do" list will be local government performance and (the department formerly known as) DLUHC's attempts to improve this through the establishment of OFLOG, the Office for Local Government.

The election marked the exact anniversary of Michael Gove's [statement](#) setting up OFLOG through the policy document, [Understanding and supporting local government performance](#). Its remit was "to provide authoritative and accessible data and analysis about the performance of local government and support its improvement".

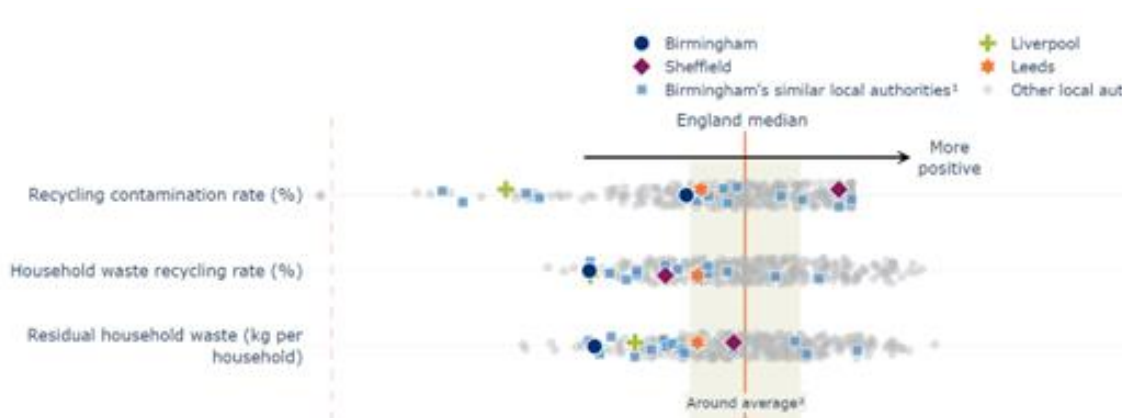
Gove was at pains to stress "this is not about recreating the Audit Commission". With that point at least, I agree. Whereas the Audit Commission was fiercely independent, often willing to criticise government policy where it was a factor in poor performance, OFLOG was established as an office of the department within the DLUHC department itself. Whereas the Audit Commission developed comprehensive performance measures which were rigorously audited to assure consistency, OFLOG picked 27 PIs and published these. Whereas the Audit Commission provided detailed national studies to inform best practice in local services, sometimes leading to wholesale systems change such as around [youth justice services](#), with the local implementation of recommendations then supported by local specialist value for money auditors, the

nascent OFLOG offered to “continue a programme of webinars to share best practice”.

An early product of OFLOG, in July 2023, was its “Local Authority Data Explorer”, which now brings together PIs on waste management, planning, adult social care, roads, and corporate and financial issues. For each service, users can select three comparison councils to produce scatter charts like Figure 1, which compares my local council’s waste management with that of three other big cities. One may say this is perhaps not the most compelling presentation of data in the world, arguably significantly less clear or flexible than the LGA’s excellent [Inform tool](#) which has been freely available for several years and includes thousands of published metrics.

Caution should be applied to OFLOG’s position within a ministerial setting and the potential for politicians to be selective in how they use data for judging local authorities that are not of their political persuasion. Whilst some may argue that the former Audit Commission may have been too powerful, it did provide a greater degree of transparency and objectivity at interpreting performance data

Figure 1: Waste management



As my colleague in INLOGOV, Dr Philip Whiteman, has recently argued, the new government should ensure that OFLOG is independent of government with a remit to focus on:

- Working with the sector to identify councils at risk of failure to ensure that support can be provided from within the sector, minimising the need for government intervention.
- Collecting, analysing, and reporting data to enable individual councils, groups of councils and the sector nationally to make progress with shared priorities agreed with government.

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- Developing intelligence from on-going engagement with councils.
 - Supporting improvement in local services and councils' contribution to national outcomes through researching, synthesising, and disseminating good practice.
 - Working with academic institutions such as INLOGOV to incorporate key lessons from existing and future research.

We can be confident that local government performance overall is strong, and sector-led improvement has demonstrated our collective commitment to continuous improvement. But with so much of the new government's ambitious "Missions" depending on highly effective local government, we need to take a fresh look at how OFLOG can be further developed to identify and propagate good practice across the sector.

Jason Lowther

Director, Institute of Local Government Studies (INLOGOV) at the University of Birmingham. Jason was employed by the Audit Commission from 1994 to 2004.

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LARIA in London Group

The London regional group restarted in November 2023 and kicked off with a show and tell network meeting. We had presentations from the Local Government Association Data Programme about the [various tools and support](#) that are available to councils. Westminster City Council on their new Cumulative Impact Assessment, which allowed their licensing team to gauge the impact of licensed premises on local crime with the use of spatial clustering and hot-spot analysis. With GeoPlace and the Greater London Authority rounding off the session with a presentation on their work compiling data from various sources, all linked by Unique Property Reference Numbers (UPRNS), to locate basement properties in London and [inform residents on methods to protect themselves from flash flooding events](#).

The regional group held another networking meeting in March 2024 with a focus on place-based projects and analysis. The number of presenters expanded from our first meeting with a range of fascinating presentations. We heard from the London Office of Technology and Innovation (LOTI) about the development of a pan-London [Strategic Insights Tools for Rough Sleeping](#). We were joined by Dr Michela Tinelli from the London School of Economics and Political Science who presented her work on the [LSE](#)

[data driven approach to innovative homeless management](#). The London Borough of Hackney spoke about a project they undertook to identify Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs) and how they have used UPRNs to link up important data sets. ProxyAddress spoke about their product which uses duplicated address to connect those facing homelessness with support. Finally, CACI presented on the topic of 'putting demand before supply in residential development' which covered how the use of their demand-based datasets can uncover the different relationships between residential supply and demand.

The London regional group has been publishing all of the presentations to its [KHub page](#) and is planning to host another network meeting in the autumn.

LARIA in the West Midlands Group

The West Midlands regional group has completed a survey of members' interests which is being analysed to help develop a future agenda.

News

Understanding the use of the UK Data Service



We are contacting you to ask for your assistance. The UK Data Service would like to improve our understanding of our services – access to secondary data, training and supporting materials – for the local government and voluntary and community sector. The short survey asks about the data you use, your awareness and experience of the UK Data Service, and the sector you work in. It should only take 10 minutes to complete. Before you decide whether to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve. The research is designed to improve our understanding of the experiences and needs of local government and voluntary sector for access to secondary data, training and support that are delivered by the UK Data Service.

We would like you to complete the short survey if you are over the age of 18 and involved in research or data analysis for local government, their partners or the

voluntary sector. All data collected will be anonymous.

You can access the survey [HERE](#)

Manchester City Council Launches Measuring Inequalities Toolkit

Manchester City Council, in collaboration with the University of Manchester, has launched a new [Measuring Inequalities Toolkit](#). The Toolkit was developed as part of the [Making Manchester Fairer Programme](#) and is an online, open access training resource that can be used to understand different statistical methodologies for measuring inequality in health outcomes and the wider social and economic determinants of health.

To provide further insights into the Toolkit, a recording of a detailed webinar is now available on the Health Equity Network platform. This webinar covers the key features of the Toolkit and demonstrates its practical applications.

Please join the [Health Equity Network](#) to gain access to this webinar and a wealth of other resources aimed at promoting health equity.

For more information about the Toolkit, please contact Neil Bendel, Public Health Specialist (Health Intelligence), in the Department of Public Health at Manchester City Council on neil.bendel@manchester.gov.uk.

Leveraging data for better housing conditions: damp and mould management in the London Borough of Hackney



Data insights have become a critical tool for identifying and addressing housing issues efficiently in the London Borough of Hackney. The team at Hackney wanted to create an intelligent dataset that identifies properties at risk of damp and mould and those housing vulnerable residents. Extracting data from the repairs system, which primarily focuses on trades like carpentry, plumbing and electrical works posed challenges. The

team managed to identify key flags such as older properties, wet rooms, low-rise buildings (under six floors), poor insulation, and overcrowded conditions.

[Find out how they did this, and why accurate address information is fundamental to this type of analysis here.](#)

Courses, Training Events and Webinars

Save the Date

Laria

Local Area Research + Intelligence Association

We're pleased to announce that on Tuesday 26th November 2024, LARIA, supported by the Local Government Association will hold their one day conference and awards at the LGA offices in London, which will also celebrate LARIA turning 50!

The theme for this year's conference is 'We are not alone: artificial intelligence and data science – friend or foe?'

Registration and applications for awards submissions will open early September.

Jobs

City of Doncaster Council job vacancy: Policy & Insight Manager

(Grade 9, £37,363 - £41,438 (Pay award pending))



City of Doncaster Council

Working in Policy, Insight and Change, you will become part of a fast-paced environment, central in helping Doncaster to become one of the most successful places in England and delivering on our ambitions set out in our Doncaster Delivering Together strategy. The Policy, Insight and Change team is the engine room for policy, data,

research and delivery, supporting the leadership of the Council and Partnerships at a local, regional and national level.

The team is looking for a confident and dedicated person who is passionate about making a difference to people's lives. This post is a generic role in that it will work across a range of strategic themes alongside multiple directorates and service areas. These will include, but are not limited to, economy and inclusive growth, environment, education and skills, housing, health and wellbeing, and community safety.

The successful candidate will work on strategy and policy development, briefings, research, funding opportunities and support wider pieces of work associated with numerous strategic priorities.

Click the following link and search 'Policy' for further details [Job Search \(webitrent.com\)](#). Or access the Council jobs section of our website www.doncaster.gov.uk.

To submit a job advert to appear in the newsletter or on the LARIA website, please download and complete this [form](#) (Full Corporate and Corporate Members only). You can also post Job Vacancies on the Jobs Board in the LARIA [Members' Area](#).

The next newsletter submission deadline is [Thursday 22nd August](#).

Are you a Corporate or Full Corporate Member?

The logo for Laria, consisting of the word "Laria" in a bold, teal, sans-serif font.

Local Area Research + Intelligence Association

Your LARIA Corporate Membership entitles you to submit content to the monthly LARIA newsletter, if you have any research, events, job adverts, resources or news which you would us to include please send it to admin@laria.org.uk.

The next newsletter submission deadline is [Thursday 22nd August](#).

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