Laria
Local Area Research + Intelligence Association

# LARIA Mini Newsletter August 2025

## LARIA Updates

**LGOF: CPA-lite or Daily Mail target practice?**

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Last month, Local Government Minister Jim McManus announced a new Local Government Outcomes Framework (LGOF), which (he said) "forms an integral part of this Government's reforms to ensure we have a sector which is fit, legal and decent". These reforms are already pretty extensive, including LG reorganisation, devolution, community engagement, member standards and funding arrangements.

The LGOF framework, the Minister hopes, "will help to put the right checks and balances in place to ensure value for the taxpayer and results for citizens to whom councils are ultimately responsible". Given the removal of most systematic monitoring of local performance and outcomes in England with the demise of the Audit Commission a decade ago, is this a new dawn for helpful local insights and intelligent central steering, or the raw material for a crude league table that obscures more than it illuminates?

History shows the difficulty of designing and using performance measures effectively. Whilst the logic of measuring what matters to inform management (and political) decision making is clear, and there are many examples of successful applications, there are enough examples of failures and unintended negative consequences to encourage caution.

The immediate precursor to LGOF was a set of measures developed by the ill-fated Office of Local Government (OFLOG). These were immediately manipulated by the Times newspaper into a league table, labelling Nottingham as the worst council. The fact that this took place

during the pre-election period only made the impact more negative, leading to a stinging letter from the LGA to the then Secretary of State, Michael Gove. OFLOG was in some ways set up to fail. Sited inside the Ministry, its political independence was immediately open to challenge. And reconciling providing local authorities with better data at the same time as acting as an accountability mechanism to central government was always going to be tricky.

The health service experience of performance measures and targets presents mixed evidence. It appears that four-hour A&E waiting times targets were associated with reduced mortality, but at the same time there were examples of departments admitting patients near to the time limit at the expense of others more in need of urgent care, a few examples of blatant misrepresentation of figures, and some bizarre holding of patients in ambulances and redefinition of corridors as wards.

Key lessons from these examples include the importance of having a clear focus for the LGOF and the adoption of a broad 'exploratory' approach to presenting the performance measures. As the Institute for Government argued for OFLOG, a key contribution could be making data more consistently available, comparable and usable – and hence supporting evidence-based policy making through the deliberative use of robust evidence.

The LGOF data needs to be presented in ways that enable and encourage exploration and questioning, rather than simplistic league tables which ignore the inherent differences between different councils in terms of population, geography, deprivation, funding, etc. It therefore needs exhibit what I call the three Cs: to be comparable across councils, contextualised to reflect local circumstances, and citizen-focussed (accessible to lay people).

There are many positive features of the new framework, including its attempt to look at missions and outcomes (rather than just council outputs). Interested parties have until 12 September 2025 to respond to the Government's consultation. Councils can easily see how the proposed LGOF measures look for them using the excellent new LG Inform LGOF report.

Dr Jason Lowther
Director of Inlogov (the Institute of Local Government Studies) at the University of Birmingham.

## Courses, Training Events and Webinars

**Webinar: SODA - A guide to successful data sharing across public services**

Our next data webinar looks at data sharing across public services. The Suffolk Office of Data and Analytics (SODA) will share how they overcome information governance, processes and systems including how they shared record-level data that is identifiable.

We will also hear how they set up a linked dataset using Splink (an open-source Python package which helps deduplicate and link records without common UIDs) from planning to implementation along with an outline of the process and use cases.

This webinar is free to all English council officers and will be suited to analysts, intelligence specialists, and service leads from all departments who are keen to make better use of their data.

Date: 17 September 2025
Time: 11:00 until 12:00
Link: https://lgaevents.local.gov.uk/lga/frontend/reg/thome.csp?pageID=921907&eventID=2645

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## Jobs

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 25th September.

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**Are you a Corporate or Full Corporate Member?**

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 25th September.

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