

Benchmarking Strategy

This Benchmarking Strategy comprises two main elements.

- a) A short “policy” (Part 1), which sets out the Council’s broad position with regard to Benchmarking
- b) A Benchmarking Guidance which provide further advice and guidance to interpret the Policy and to enable those involved with Benchmarking to undertaken it effectively

Part 1 : Benchmarking Policy

- 1 Warwick District Council will seek to compare itself with high performing organisations and where possible, this should be Best in Class
- 2 Warwick District Council will use comparative data from the National Best Value Performance Indicators to assess the quality of the services we provide and to identify the Best in Class organisations
- 3 Where possible Warwick District Council will compare itself with others in relation to other priority performance data (i.e. local indicators)
- 4 Warwick District Council recognises that the value of performance data benchmarking is in identifying Best in Class and that benchmarking processes with the Best in Class is vital to making effective use of Benchmarking
- 5 Where appropriate, Warwick District Council will play an active role in themed benchmarking clubs to encourage informal benchmarking to take place and to enable formal comparison with other members to take place
- 6 Warwick District Council will take all reasonable steps to assist others with benchmarking requests (in the form of questionnaires, or benchmarking visits), particularly where we have Best in Class performance and processes
- 7 Benchmarking with Best in Class will be used in the following circumstances :
 - In undertaking Best Value and other Service Reviews
 - Where appropriate in developing the annual Service Area Plans
 - Identifying targets
 - Identifying services for improvement action
 - Developing major projects
 - Continuous service monitoring and improvement

Using Benchmarking data effectively

- 8 Warwick District Council will ensure benchmarking is used effectively by using the following tools :
 - a) Best Value Reviews : Comparison is a key element of Best Value Reviews.

- Best Value Review teams will use comparative data to assess the level of service currently being provided and will use process benchmarking to help identify potential service improvements
- b) Service Area Plans : the Service Area Plan preparation checklist will be used at the commencement of the Service Area Plan process to identify issues that need to be addressed during the year ahead. This will include an assessment of benchmarking undertaken in the previous 12 months along with key lessons learnt from the benchmarking.
 - c) Target Setting : Targets will be set in one of three ways. If they are set as part of a Best Value Review Improvement Plan they will use benchmarking as set out in (a) above. If they are set as part of the Service Area Plan process, benchmarking will be used as set out in (b) above. If they are set in any other way, then a target setting proforma will be completed. These include the potential to set the target based on comparison with Best in Class.
 - d) Identifying services for improvement action : the Council will use benchmarking data as a means of identifying which services require focused improvement action to improve performance. Quartile information from national BVPIs will be key in this.
 - e) Developing major projects : where the Council is undertaking major projects, it will use appropriate benchmarking. The timing and method will be set out in the project plan
 - f) Continuous Service Monitoring and Improvement : the method and nature of this kind of benchmarking will be down to the individual service manager and will depend on the nature of the service involved. This may be undertaken through membership of benchmarking clubs, membership of county or regional groups or just through informal contacts.

Part 2 : Benchmarking Guidance

Introduction

Benchmarking is increasingly becoming an everyday part of work within the Council as a means to aid continuous improvement. The modernisation agenda recognises benchmarking as a key tool in the improvement of local authorities and their services.

Benchmarking is an essential aspect of the 4C's, enabling the Council to **Compare** performance with other authorities or private and voluntary sector providers. It also allows the authority to demonstrate that it can **Compete** in the market place.

As more and more Councils are looking to this method of comparing their services with other local authorities or private organisations it inevitably creates additional demands in responding to requests for information. To ease the burden it is useful to develop a Benchmarking Protocol, establishing who Warwick District Council will benchmark with and at what times. It is important, however, to allow flexibility so that individual units or services may benchmark outwith this protocol if considered beneficial by the Head of Unit or Service Manager and approved by the Strategic Director.

When to Benchmark

Benchmarking should always be considered as a useful tool if one of the activities set out in section 8 of the Policy above is being undertaken. To enable this to be done effectively, benchmarking needs to be planned in advance and should be appropriate to the service being benchmarked and reason for the benchmarking. In most cases, successful benchmarking will initially involve a statistical analysis to identify best in class, followed by process benchmarking to ascertain how the best in class have achieved their performance.

Who to Benchmark With

The selection of benchmarking partners is important. The Local Government Act 1999 places a duty on local authorities to compare with the private and voluntary sectors, as well as other public sector bodies.

Best Value Inspectors Expectations

The Best Value Inspectors will make comparisons between the Council and the recognised Family Group, using the nationally available indicators as well as CIPFA returns. It would be strongly advisable to ensure that these indicators are included within any proposed benchmarking project and that the project includes all members of the Family Group.

Looking to Improve

When preparing for benchmarking consideration should be given to which of the following groups could be involved, and what organisation is best placed to become an effective benchmarking partner:

- . Private sector
- . Voluntary sector
- . Professional bodies
- . Other local authorities

Other local authorities could include police, fire, health and transport authorities as well as other councils. These organisations all operate within the public domain, many are subject to Best Value and will, for day to day operation, require similar services (particularly support services).

The reasons for selecting other councils to compare with should be clearly based upon objective reasons. It is recommended that benchmarking should be undertaken with councils who are:

- . Within the Warwick District Council Family Group
- . Other Warwickshire Councils
- . Inter Authorities Group members
- . Identified as "the best" e.g. Beacon Councils, Charter Mark, etc.

Details of the membership of these groups is contained in Appendix 1. Approaches to the Family Group or Inter Authorities Group this should be made through the Policy & Projects

Officer (Best Value).

The purpose of benchmarking is to facilitate improvement. This means it is essential when selecting comparator councils to give consideration to their performance in the chosen area. It is worth making efforts to include some councils which are identified as “the best” through the possession of some form of quality recognition which is relevant to the subject of the review.

Recognition must be given to the identification of good practice and the benefits of different working methods adopted within the Council. It is therefore important to consider opportunities to benchmark internally within Warwick District Council when looking at similar processes or areas of work.

In some instances comparisons with the private or voluntary sector will be easy (e.g. housing benchmarking with housing associations), for others it will be more difficult. On these occasions, consideration should be given to what similar processes could be benchmarked, rather than trying to benchmark a whole service.

Comparing Satisfaction

To allow for comparisons within the Council and with other public and private sector organisations key satisfaction indicators shall be adopted. These indicators, which may be benchmarked with other organisations, will primarily be used for making internal comparisons in areas such as satisfaction with staff, responsiveness of the service and handling of complaints.

Sharing Best Practice

Within Warwick District Council we recognise the need to learn from the best. This places responsibilities upon the Council to help others in areas in which we have been identified as providing excellent services, or having developed best practice.

We shall be willing to join in meaningful benchmarking exercises to help others improve in any areas in which the Council has been awarded a Charter Mark, Beacon Status or other quality recognition for service excellence or practices adopted.

In areas falling into this category effort should be made to assist others to progress, taking into account the resources available within the particular service or unit.

Which Method of Benchmarking Should be Used

Details of the four types of benchmarking are included within Section 9 of the Best Value Guide. Consideration should be given to which method(s) will be used, depending on the needs of the area under review.

The basic rule for benchmarking will be that, generally, the following methods would be appropriate:

		REVIEW TYPE	
		<u>Service Based</u>	<u>Cross Cutting</u>
BENC HMAR KING TYPE	<u>Data</u>	Yes	Yes
	<u>Process</u>	Probably	Probably
	<u>Functional</u>	Maybe	Unlikely
	<u>Strategic</u>	Unlikely	Probably

There will remain flexibility for services to undertake the type(s) of benchmarking that are considered most appropriate. It would, however, be unwise to proceed with any part of the benchmarking process without giving full consideration to what results are expected and what information is needed.

Responsibilities for Benchmarking

Benchmarking will be lead by the Business Unit or Service responsible for the area in which the project lies. When preparing for the exercise as part of a Best Value Review the relevant Policy & Projects Officer should be involved.

The results of the benchmarking exercise should be analysed before being presented to members so that the key findings may be drawn out.

Co-ordination of Benchmarking

For each benchmarking project a short form should be completed, allowing details to be entered onto a Benchmarking Database being established by the IDeA. This form is available in electronic format from the Policy & Projects Officer (Best Value) who may be able to provide further advice or support for those undertaking benchmarking projects.

Results of all benchmarking projects should be maintained on file by the relevant Unit or Service so that they may be incorporated within the Best Value Review.

Results of all satisfaction benchmarking should be reported to the Policy & Projects Officer (Best Value) who will be able to provide indications of how it compares internally and with external organisations.

Benchmarking Resources

Library of Local Performance Indicators

This was set up by the IDeA and ODPM in 2003, to provide the potential to compare local performance indicators on a national basis. The library is populated with a range of local performance indicators from authorities across the Country. It therefore has the potential to be used to identify useful performance indicators as well as to compare performance with other who use the same local performance indicators

Public Sector Benchmarking Service

The Council is a member of the Public Sector Benchmarking Service. The Service provides regular e-bulletins as well as a newsletter. Information from the bulletins is received by Policy and Performance who circulate relevant section to other Units within the Council

Warwick District Council Family Group

Ashford Borough Council	Charnwood Borough Council	Cheltenham Borough Council	Chester City Council
Colchester Borough Council	East Staffordshire Borough Council	Harrogate Borough Council	Macclesfield Borough Council
Maidstone Borough Council	North Hertfordshire District Council	Rugby Borough Council	St Edmondsbury Borough Council
Taunton Deane Borough Council	Tunbridge Wells Borough Council	Worcester City Council	

Warwickshire Councils

North Warwickshire Borough Council	Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council	Rugby Borough Council	Stratford-on-Avon District Council
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Inter Authorities Group

Warwick District Council is a member of the IAG and this group not only provides a potential statistical benchmarking group, but more importantly is also produces regular bulletins to keep its members abreast of national developments and arranges regular seminars/meetings to discuss cutting edge issues and to compare approaches to dealing with these. Members of the group are :

Arun District Council	Ashford Borough Council	Aylesbury Vale District Council	Babergh District Council
Barking & Dagenham London Borough Council	Barnet London Borough Council	Basildon District Council	Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council
Bedfordshire County Council	Bexley London Borough Council	Bolsover District Council	Braintree District Council
Breckland District Council	Bromley London Borough Council	Caerphilly County Borough Council	Cambridgeshire County Council
Camden London Borough Council	Canterbury City Council	Charnwood Borough Council	Chelmsford Borough Council

Colchester Borough Council	Corby Borough Council	Crawley Borough Council	Croydon London Borough Council
Dacorum Borough Council	Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council	East Hampshire District Council	Enfield London Borough Council
Epping Forest District Council	Epsom & Ewell Borough Council	Essex County Council	Fareham Borough Council
Flintshire County Council	Guildford Borough Council	Haringey London Borough Council	Havant Borough Council
Havering London Borough Council	Hertfordshire County Council	Hillingdon London Borough Council	Ipswich Borough Council
Islington London Borough Council	Kent County Council	Kettering Borough Council	Kings Lynn & West Norfolk Borough Council
Leicester City Council	Lewisham London Borough Council	Lincoln City Council	Lincolnshire County Council
Maidstone Borough Council	Malvern Hills District Council	Medway Borough Council	Mid Bedfordshire District Council
Mid Suffolk District Council	Milton Keynes Unitary Authority	New Forest District Council	Norfolk County Council
North East Lincolnshire Unitary Authority	North Norfolk District Council	Northamptonshire County Council	Nottingham City Council
Oxford City Council	Peterborough City Council	Portsmouth City Council	Redbridge London Borough Council
Reigate & Banstead Borough Council	Richmond London Borough Council	Runnymede Borough Council	Rushmore Borough Council
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council	Slough Unitary Authority	Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council	South Bedfordshire District Council
South Hams District Council	South Norfolk District Council	South Northamptonshire District Council	Southampton City Council
Southend on Sea Unitary Authority	St Edmundsbury Borough Council	Stevenage Borough Council	Suffolk County Council
Surrey County Council	Sutton London Borough Council	Tandridge District Council	Tendring District Council
Three Rivers District Council	Thurrock Unitary Authority	Waltham Forest London Borough Council	Warwickshire County Council
Watford Borough Council	Waveney District Council	Westminster City Council	Weymouth & Portland Borough Council
Wiltshire County Council	Winchester City Council	Wokingham Unitary Authority	Worcester City Council
Wycombe District Council			

Please note that membership of the Inter Authorities Group may change as new members join on a regular basis.

Appendix 2

Benchmarking Satisfaction

To allow the accurate benchmarking of satisfaction within Warwick District Council and with established benchmarking partners the following standard satisfaction measures will be adopted:

- Considering everything, how satisfied are you with the service you receive?
- How satisfied are you with the quality of advice you received from.....?
- How satisfied are you with the quality of information you received from.....?
- How satisfied are you with the quantity of information you received from.....?
- How satisfied are you with the time taken to respond to queries?
- How satisfied are you with the quality of verbal communication?
- How satisfied are you with the quality of written communication?
 - *How easy to understand are the letters you receive from?*
 - *How easy to understand are the forms you receive from?*
- How satisfied are you that staff were clear and easy to understand?
- How satisfied are you with the courtesy of staff?
- How satisfied are you with the helpfulness of staff?
- How satisfied are you with the way problems was resolved?
- How satisfied are you with the way your complaint was dealt with?

It is not expected that each question will be asked, but instead the most relevant ones should be selected and used within the proposed surveys.