<u>**Oflog Policy Document**</u>

Office for Local Government – Understanding and Supporting Local Government Performance

Contents

Executive Summary

Local government has a critical role in providing essential services, fostering community development, and reflecting the unique needs and priorities of each local area. Its contribution to society should be better understood and celebrated. We want to recognise councils that perform well so that local leaders get the credit that they deserve; and showcase the very best in class so that others can learn from them.

The level of responsibility that local authorities possess is matched by the size of challenge that accompanies it. The breadth, pace, and impact of their response to global challenges such as the Covid-19 pandemic or housing over 100,000 Ukrainians has shown the importance of locally led responses. Successive waves of devolution have also, rightly, placed more power and responsibility in the hands of local government.

Unfortunately, alongside the many examples of success there are a small number of examples of serious failure. In recent years we have had to intervene in an increasing number of local authorities, which comes at a cost to local people and taxpayers across the country. Due to the impact these have and the fact that they are often avoidable, we cannot simply stand by without doing something to address them. As a department, we are addressing these instances of failure as well as taking additional steps to introduce greater accountability of local government. We know that most councils are taking the right steps to ensure that they are not at risk of serious failure; but we want such interventions to be avoided entirely.

Beyond the high-profile cases of failure, it is also natural that any system as diverse as local government will do things differently in different places including where the delivery of an outcome may not be the sole responsibility of the local authority. We must recognise that this sometimes reflects different local circumstances, the legitimate choices of local voters or different models of partnership working – and it is important that we understand where variation is due to more effective ways of delivering services.

It is within this context that we are establishing the Office for Local Government (Oflog), a new performance body for local government, which will provide authoritative and accessible data and analysis about the performance of local government, and support its improvement.

We envisage a local government system where powers and funding are devolved as close as possible to their communities, paired with effective accountability; where councillors and the public are confident and have the information they need to effectively scrutinise local decisions; where council leaders and officers can benchmark themselves against their peers and find examples of great practice to learn from; and where central government and its partners can quickly identify where there might be challenges and step in to give support, where appropriate.

We have started to deliver on some of the above through our trailblazer deeper devolution deals with West Midlands and Greater Manchester; the expansion of devolution to Northeast England; and initial steps have been taken to address complexity in the funding landscape. And in parallel, we are delivering other initiatives to strengthen the overall system such as introducing new, statutory best value guidance and improving capacity and capability of the sector. Oflog will work alongside these system changes as well as local government, who remain best placed to drive their own improvement. Underpinning all of this is the need for much greater accountability, which will be enabled by increased transparency and driven by accessible, meaningful, and insightful data.

To better understand local government performance, we need to attain a clearer view of what good performance entails as well as tell-tale signs of those on the road to serious failure. To do this we need to use data more effectively. Although there is some strength in the amount of data currently collected, the dispersal of it limits its collective value and use. This illustrates the need for an organisation that can locate itself at the centre of this nexus, synthesising the data that is currently available, making it more accessible and useful for all users by understanding their needs – without increasing the current data burden on councils.

Oflog will improve the transparency of local government performance through the publication of carefully selected data on the new Local Authority Data Explorer. Through this data and associated analysis, it will enable understanding and interpretation by its three main audiences – citizens, local government, and central government – of local government performance. By fostering accountability through increased transparency, Oflog will help support the improvement of local government performance.

To deliver on this vision, Oflog will start off small and, in collaboration with its user groups, build and mature over time.

Oflog will initially focus on bringing existing data together in an informative way through the Local Authority Data Explorer. This will include making it comparable and contextualised, working closely with local partners to make sure the performance of the sector as a whole and national trends can be better understood. From day one Oflog will look to supplement and expand the metrics in the Data Explorer to cover a more holistic range of local government responsibilities. It will also seek to improve the existing metrics in future versions to make them more outcomes focused as it matures. To achieve this Oflog will need to work with government departments to change data collection requests and processes. In parallel, Oflog will consider performance in areas with devolution deals so that it can reflect their progress over time. It will also start work to detect local authorities at risk of potential failure earlier in the process of decline. Where local authorities are identified as at risk of failure, Oflog will convene dialogues between councils and expert local leaders to explore the issues in more detail.

As Oflog develops, it will seek to enable improvement across the sector by helping facilitate greater use and interpretation of this data, and look for opportunities to streamline how, and how much, data is collected. Ultimately, in its most mature state, Oflog aspires to be an authoritative source of information on local government performance that can support others to interpret performance data and take action on it – particularly where the data shows early warning signs of failure.

Oflog will not be able to do this on its own and it will need to collaborate with those in the sector, who have the expertise and experience, to understand the diversity and local context that is critical to truly understanding performance. We recognise that there is not always a single version of what good looks like, but we want to encourage and facilitate more sharing of good practice between areas and working with local government experts will be critical to achieving this.

Through each step of this journey, Oflog will put data at the centre of its approach. We do not expect Oflog to become the sole source of information about local government – it will work alongside other valuable repositories of information – but it will have a unique role in establishing the best indicators of good performance. Oflog will not set targets or conduct burdensome area assessments – this is not about re-creating the Audit Commission. The Audit Commission was regulating, micromanaging, and inspecting local councils forcing them to spend time ticking boxes and filling in forms rather than getting on with the business of local government. In doing so it was hindering local transparency and scrutiny. Local government already works within a framework of statutory powers and responsibilities. Oflog will not add new responsibilities onto local government

or seek to establish an expensive compliance regime, thereby safeguarding the principle of democratic accountability.

In developing Oflog, the Department has worked with a number of leaders and chief executives of local authorities, as well as several sector bodies and organisations. Oflog wants to continue doing so, especially as it evolves as an organisation. We have set out a clear direction of travel so that others can be a part of this journey and influence its development. A high-performing local government has benefits for all and we look forward to Oflog helping the sector build on its successes.

Chapter 1: Context and Rationale

Background

The local government sector directly provides more than 800 services to its local communities, as well as having a wider community leadership and place-based role. This means a strong and sustainable local government sector is crucial in making local areas great places to live and work.

Local authorities are democratically independent organisations. The councillors that lead them do so based on a democratic mandate received from the people that live in that area. They must work collaboratively with citizens and local partners to agree and deliver on local priorities – which will naturally differ from place to place.

They are also crucial partners for central government, with a range of different government departments relying on local government to help deliver their policies. Local authorities in England have statutory duties to provide a range of services to their communities, which include education services; safeguarding and social care; waste collection; planning and housing services; and road maintenance. They are funded for these services by a combination of central grant and local taxation, and it is therefore of paramount importance that the right accountability to central government, as well as to local people, is in place.

The Importance of Better Understanding Performance

In order for central government to support a strong local government sector, it is essential to understand how well it is performing. The structural complexities, as well as a convoluted data landscape, make this difficult to do. There is a lack of agreed outcomes upon which to understand performance consistently and comparatively, and while there is an abundance of data available, the way it is dispersed means that it is not necessarily accessible.

In addition, we cannot and should not ignore the reality that some councils run into serious difficulties. Recent years have seen a small but significant number of serious financial and governance failures in local government. There is an important role to play in better understanding what the early warnings signs might be, therefore enabling more effective prevention.

Our plans to have a devolution deal at or approaching the deepest level of devolution, for every area in England that wants one by 2030, accentuate the need for a greater understanding of local government performance for both citizens and the Government. The Government believes that giving local leaders increased freedoms creates improved outcomes but given the scale of this ambition it is right that we have the appropriate checks and balances in the system. If we are to deliver an ambitious programme of devolution that gains and retains public trust, then attention needs to be paid to what is being delivered in its name.

As with all democratic institutions, a key part of accountability is scrutiny from the independent media. Improving the accessibility of data for the media to effectively scrutinise and better understand local government performance will strengthen this essential component of local accountability.

Chapter 2: The Office for Local Government

Strategic Basis for Oflog

Vision
The **vision** for the Office for Local Government (Oflog) is for it to provide authoritative and accessible data and analysis about the performance of local government, and support its improvement.

Oflog's **strategic objectives** are to:
- empower citizens with information about their local authority, enabling them to hold local leaders to account
- increase local leaders' and councils' understanding of their relative performance, supporting them to improve and better innovate
- increase central government's understanding of local government performance, highlighting excellence and identifying risk of failure to facilitate timely and targeted support

Oflog's work to understand local government performance will always draw on the best available data and evidence.

What is the problem Oflog is trying to solve?

Local councils play a vital role in our communities and as the frontline of our democracy, and they are critical partners in our objective to level up the nation. We all want councils to perform well and where they do we want to celebrate this. There is also always scope for improvement and while it is clear many councils have a strong track record of successfully delivering for their electorate it is difficult to have a comprehensive understanding of how local government is performing.

There is no shared view of what good performance looks like and the data that is available can be challenging for central government, citizens and other local authorities to use. Oflog will seek to address this by improving access to data, increasing transparency and fostering accountability – while also highlighting excellence and showcasing success.

In recent years we have also seen instances of a small but significant number of local authority governance and financial failures, which directly impacts local communities. At a time when central government are increasingly devolving more powers there is a need to have the appropriate checks and balances in the system. Oflog will play a significant role in the wider work to establish a stronger accountability framework, including identifying and supporting at-risk councils.

Scope

Local authorities from the following parts of local government in England only will be in scope: districts, borough and city councils; county councils; unitary councils; London boroughs; metropolitan boroughs; and combined authorities (including those led by elected Mayors). Oflog will engage with the devolved administrations and work with similar organisations in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

Our Approach to Performance

An integral part of Oflog's work will be to cultivate the existing culture of improvement and further support the successes of local government. This will be achieved through many routes: from the publication of existing data that is comparable, has clear context and shows where improvement is possible, to identifying and supporting local authorities at risk of failure. The elevated level of transparency will help reflect the strong levels of performance across local government, as well as supporting efforts to improve it where it is most needed.

In its initial stages, Oflog may make use of input and output metrics that do not consider the overall impact of services delivered by local authorities. The ambition is, however, to transition as soon as possible to an outcomes-based approach to performance that focuses on impact. This will accommodate the fact that local authorities use different models of service delivery, though input and output data can be useful to give an accurate understanding of a local authority's specific contribution.
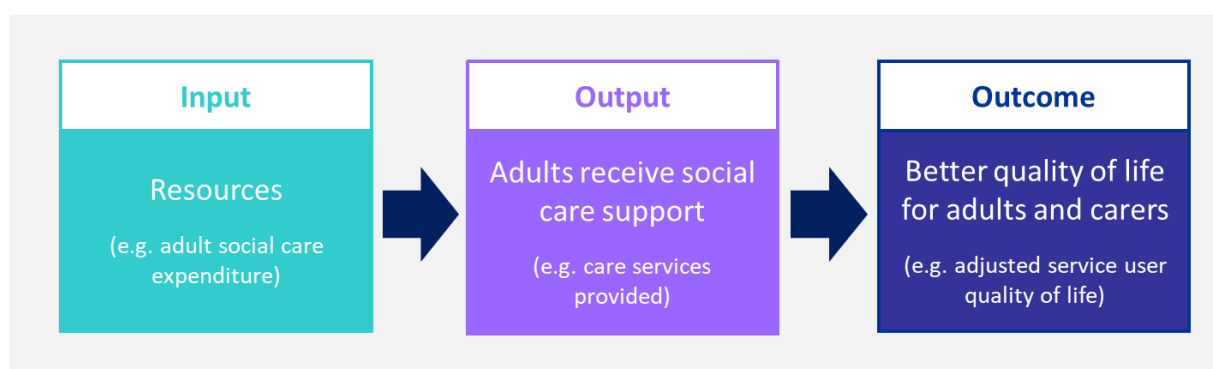

Figure 1: Example of Input, Output and Outcome metrics for adult social care

The foundations of Oflog's functions will be developed using existing data. This means Oflog's work will draw on data from several existing mechanisms. Oflog will work in parallel with initiatives like the Single Data List and the Local Government Transparency Code which aim to make more information available to taxpayers to support scrutiny and make it easier for local people to contribute to local decision making.

The responsibilities of government and local authorities under the code and Single Data List, respectively, will not change and Oflog will have no formal role in these mechanisms. Given the work Oflog will be undertaking, it will need to be cognisant of these responsibilities and should work in partnership with government and local authorities to support the review of new and surplus data requirements.

While everything Oflog does will be rooted in robust data, data alone does not give a comprehensive account of performance. This is especially true because 'what good looks like' will vary depending on place, circumstance and local priorities. Therefore, when Oflog publishes metrics in the data explorer, it will be supported by contextual and explanatory information. This will be further built up over time, particularly as Oflog takes on an increasingly interpretative role.

Oflog will work closely with inspectorates, regulators, agencies and other bodies in the local government data ecosystem. Oflog does not want to duplicate or add further unnecessary

complexity to this ecosystem, so is committed to collaboration with these organisations to ensure its works complements and enhances their efforts to best promote a holistic understanding of the sector's performance. For example, Oflog will not duplicate local assessments conducted by regulators such as the Care Quality Commission and Ofsted. Oflog will rely on the assessments conducted by these bodies, and others with relevant statutory functions, when it is considering the performance of local government in relation to the services these bodies regulate.

Chapter 3: What will Oflog do?

Oflog's development will be an iterative process and its functions will develop over time in order to fulfil its long-term vision.
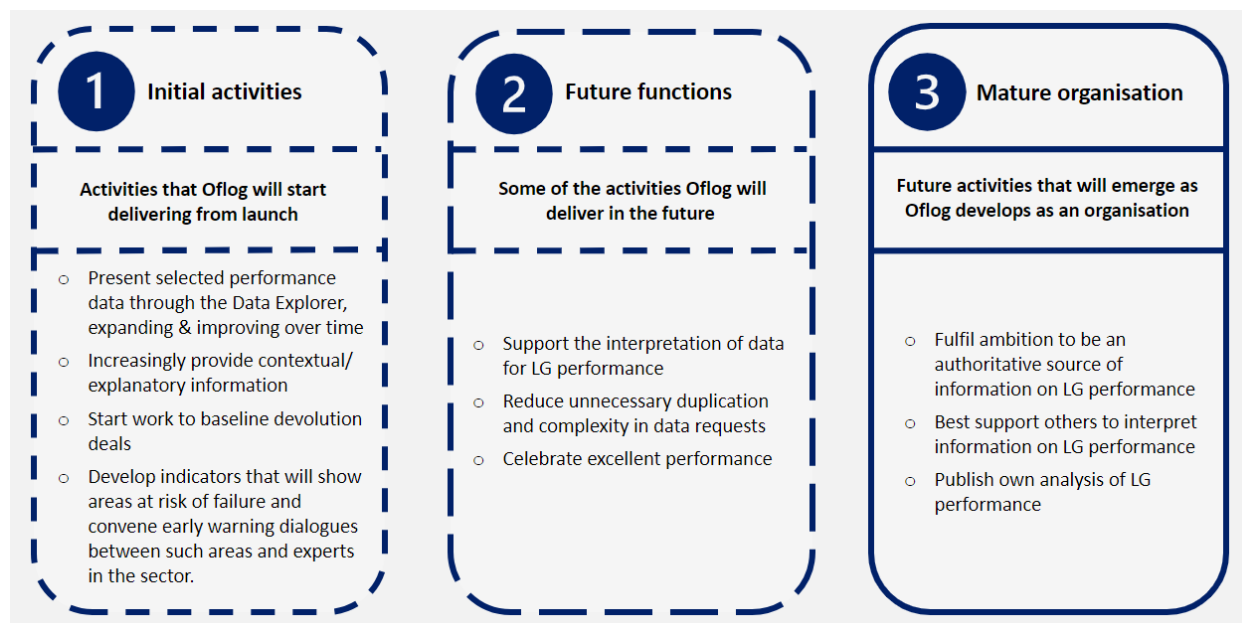

Figure 2: Overview of Oflog's development

Initial Activities

Oflog will take over responsibility for the further development of our Local Authority Data Explorer tool (hereon referred to as Data Explorer). From the outset, sharing performance data through this Data Explorer will be central to what Oflog does. The Data Explorer will bring together existing data that is often disparate in one place, to publish a clear and coherent picture of performance against particular outcome themes.

We have started with the publication of data on a small number of service areas but Oflog will expand this to cover a more holistic range of local government responsibilities. Oflog will also seek to improve the existing metrics in future versions of the Data Explorer, based on the feedback that it receives. By applying virtuous cycles of 'publish, expand and improve, publish', our aim is for the Data Explorer to house a well-rounded, and carefully curated, collection of metrics that gives a holistic view of local government performance. We also want to incentivise and enable effective joint working within a place and Oflog will explore how data can be used to do that.

The Data Explorer will initially include a small number of relevant metrics covering four distinct areas – adult social care, adult skills, waste, and finance – to assess performance. This is a starting point: it is not intended, and should not be taken, as a holistic view of local government performance at this stage.

The government has worked with local authorities and their representatives to co-design most of the first set of metrics, consulting with local government practitioners through a series of workshops. Oflog intends to take a similar collaborative approach for further outcome themes, learning the lessons of what has worked most effectively as it goes. It will also work with local

government partners to review the published metrics under each outcome theme area, taking account of new and updated datasets and user needs.

Baselining Devolution Deals

Oflog will play a role in supporting devolution by enabling transparency and – by extension - accountability. By carefully selecting and publishing metrics that are most relevant to areas with devolution deals, it will be able to demonstrate the impact of devolution against outcomes that people care about. It will work closely with DLUHC and local partners, particularly the mayoral combined authorities, to make sure that the outcome metrics used are the most appropriate for holding devolved areas and their leaders to account for their performance.

Preventing failure: identifying and supporting at-risk councils

In parallel to its work on the Data Explorer and Devolution Deals, Oflog will also make use of data to detect emerging risks of failure and to ensure local authorities are supported to turn off the path towards this at an earlier juncture.

While there is no particular dataset that can give a definitive prediction of the risk of failure, Oflog will explore what suggestive factors of this risk could be through the consideration of 'soft' indicators, which may not meet rigorous analytical criteria but can still provide valuable insight.

In seeking to identify at-risk areas, Oflog will not be making any judgement of failure that necessitates formal intervention. This role remains with DLUHC through the existing Best Value framework. Instead, Oflog's role will be to monitor the indicators – which could include areas such as governance as some in the local government sector have asked for – and use them to inform whether a dialogue needs to be opened with any such local authority. If so, Oflog may convene this conversation, bringing in local leaders and experts from the sector to explore what is happening on the ground and whether the indicators are correct in giving an early warning that something is amiss. Data alone cannot provide the full picture, and therefore Oflog will take the approach of using these indicators to prompt questions, not judgements. Oflog will also explore whether the council is already taking action to address the underlying causes, and how effective this action is being.

Earlier identification of risk of failure makes providing effective support easier. Alongside this work conducted by Oflog, DLUHC has launched a consultation on new statutory guidance for best value standards and intervention. Oflog's objective to increase transparency of data across the sector will further strengthen the department's Best Value judgements of local councils. Together, the Best Value guidance and Oflog will introduce greater accountability of local government, both to the public and central government.

[TEXT BOX STARTS]

What is the Local Authority Data Explorer?

The Local Authority Data Explorer is designed to present an overview of local government performance.

The data presented in the Data Explorer will be standardised, to enable better and meaningful comparisons between authorities, and it will have the functionality to show local authorities

alongside their statistical neighbours. For statistical neighbours, we use Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accounting (CIPFA)'s nearest neighbour model[1] in order to try to compare authorities who are similar in terms of demographics and size, amongst other things.

Enabling comparison against appropriate other local authorities will be an important part of Oflog's effort to support improvement across the sector. Transparency on performance will be a first step, so that councils can be held to account on their performance through publicly available data on a carefully selected number of key outcome measures. But the ability to compare is a second step that improves users' ability to understand council performance *in context* and therefore make legitimate interpretations of performance.

As new data becomes available, Oflog will actively seek to plug data gaps and improve metrics wherever possible. Oflog will conduct further user research to be able to inform improvements to the functionality and the metrics, and it will look to work closely with users, particularly local government, in order to ensure the Data Explorer continues to be useful and meet the needs of all users.

[TEXT BOX ENDS]

Future functions

In parallel to delivering the initial activities set out above, Oflog will take on further functions over time.

Influencing the data landscape to allow improved interpretation

Oflog will work closely with local government to learn how data is best used across the sector. This will enable Oflog to be able to publish leading practice case studies to support councils that do not have as developed data collection, collation and presentation systems in place. Improvements in this area should in turn empower and enable councils to make best use of their own data to improve performance.

In parallel, Oflog will also support its user groups to interpret local government performance. This could include Oflog conducting deeper analysis on particular areas of data and publishing ad hoc thematic reports. As part of this, Oflog will also develop its understanding of how it can best support the public to understand local government performance in their area beyond having access to the Local Authority Data Explorer.

Oflog will always start by utilising existing data and packaging it in useful ways. In doing so, it will explore where unnecessary duplication or complexity in data collection and/or reporting exists and work with partners to see where reporting could be simplified or stopped. In parallel, Oflog will identify where there are gaps in the data collected and reported by local government that inhibit a fuller understanding of performance.

Celebrating excellence and supporting collaboration

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[1] https://www.cipfa.org/services/cipfastats/nearest-neighbour-model

There are many examples of exemplary performance in local government. Oflog will actively identify, celebrate and promote such examples of excellence within local government so that it can further cultivate a dynamic, cross-sector learning environment.

The way Oflog brings together data will bring into greater focus local authorities that are either 'best in class', or those that have shown drastic improvement in an unexpectedly short period of time. In a select number of cases, Oflog may explore the circumstances and actions that led to this leading practice and make suggestions for how others could use this to uplift their own performance, especially in areas where they have a common interest. Oflog will also work closely with the sector and, especially, the Local Government Association (LGA), to ensure that any exemplars are integrated into the existing sector support model.

Mature organisation

As outlined in the vision, our ambition is for Oflog's end-state to be one where it provides authoritative and accessible data and analysis about the performance of local government, and supports its improvement.

This includes identifying and supporting local authorities that may be at risk of failure, as well as publishing its own analysis of local government performance. Any and all of its own interpretation and analysis will be based on the robust evidence that data provides, and supplemented by an intimate knowledge of contextual factors including local dependencies.

Oflog will not seek to monopolise commentary on performance nor introduce centrally set targets; but instead look to be making its own contribution to the increasingly important and ever-changing local data landscape. Oflog will also pro-actively explore how the data of the future can be used to make it meaningful and valuable for our three target audiences, learning from each of them about how they see their own use of data evolving as time goes on.

Oflog's precise role and functions will be informed by lessons learned.

Engagement

As committed in the Levelling Up White Paper, DLUHC has engaged with partners and stakeholders during the development of Oflog. The Government is committed to engaging with local government and residents throughout the next phase of Oflog development, to learn what has worked well and what could be improved. The Oflog website will support local government and citizens to access up-to-date information on Oflog and we will continue to develop this so that stakeholders remain informed.

The Oflog Chair and Chief Executive will continue extensive engagement with local government politicians, managers and service providers and users to ensure their advice and understanding of local government is informed by the expertise and needs of the people that make such valuable contributions to the local government landscape.

As Oflog matures as a body and begins to take on responsibility for leading on the development of future metrics, Oflog will conduct a programme of engagement with local government to directly engage with the sector on its work and to co-design metrics. It will provide further detail on this later in the year.

Chapter 4: Approach to establishing Oflog as a new organisation

We will take a gradual approach to establishing Oflog and it will initially be set up as an office of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. As a new organisation, Oflog will need to develop to work effectively within the existing local government ecosystem and form relationships with other institutions.

Our ambition is for Oflog to become an authoritative and expert voice on information about the performance and health of local government. It will be important for Oflog to have a degree of separation from government to achieve this. A body that considers the performance of local government- which are ultimately political institutions - should be able to advocate separately from politicians, government and local government itself to attain public confidence in the objectivity and impartiality of its work. This separation needs to be balanced with an ongoing role for an elected central government in continuing to set the over-arching strategy for the body. It is important that the body considering the performance of elected local councils is underpinned by its own democratic mandate.

From [today], Oflog will begin to exist as an office of the Department, which means that Oflog will function as part of DLUHC. The DLUHC Secretary of State will be responsible for setting out the broad annual priorities by issuing a remit letter for Oflog to deliver on and to monitor Oflog's progress. DLUHC will continue to develop Oflog to ensure that it has the structures, systems, processes, and capabilities to deliver its functions with objectivity and impartiality. The DLUHC Secretary of State has already appointed an independent chair, Lord Amyas Morse, who has, and will continue to, provide independent advice, support and challenge to Oflog's strategic vision, functions, and delivery priorities. An interim CEO has been appointed to develop and operationalise Oflog. To maintain impartiality and objectivity, Oflog's governance structures and processes will be communicated transparently, and the Department will adopt mechanisms and governance arrangements to facilitate this. These arrangements will be set out publicly in due course.

Oflog will start off small and be developed iteratively. This will allow government to gather feedback on how Oflog can most effectively add value and deliver its role as a performance body, and importantly, respond promptly and adjust the approach.

Glossary

Term	Definition
Audit Commission	The Audit Commission was an independent public corporation that existed between 1 April 1983 and 31 March 2015. It used to appoint and manage auditors to local authorities in England before it ceased to exist under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014.
Best Value	The Best Value Duty relates to the statutory requirement for local authorities and other public bodies defined as best value authorities in Part 1 of the Local Government Act 1999 to "make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness". Failure to deliver best value can occur as a result of governance, financial or service delivery failure. Statutory guidance on best value standards and intervention defines the concept of best value.
Best Value Guidance	Statutory guidance issued to local authorities (including combined authorities) to provide greater clarity on how to fulfil the Best Value Duty by describing what constitutes best value, the standards expected by the department and the models of intervention at the Secretary of State's disposal in the event of failure to uphold these standards.
Best Value Notice	A new form of early and non-statutory engagement with a local authority to obtain assurance of the steps it is taking to secure compliance with the Best Value Duty.
Central government	Also known as His Majesty's Government (abbreviated to HM Government, commonly known as the Government of the United Kingdom, British Government or UK Government) is the central executive authority of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.
Central grant	Grant money from central government for local services. This is one of the main sources of funding for local government.
Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA)	A UK-based international accountancy membership and standard-setting body for public sector accountants.
Nearest neighbour model, Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountability (CIPFA)	The Nearest Neighbour Model uses a range of socio-economic indicators to group statistically similar local authorities together. The indicators selected describe the characteristics of the area each local authority operates in to ensure a balanced representation of the authorities' traits. It is designed to help local

	authorities in benchmarking exercises and interpreting performance results.
Chief Executive of a local authority	The Chief Executive, also known as the Head of Paid Service, is a public servant who ensures that all the authority's functions are properly co-ordinated as well as organising staff and appointing appropriate management. (Section 4, Local Government and Housing Act, 1989).
Combined Authorities	A combined authority (CA) is a legal body set up using national legislation that enables a group of two or more councils to collaborate and take /collective decisions across council boundaries. The creation of a CA means that member councils can be more ambitious in their joint working and can take advantage of powers and resources devolved to them from national government. While established by Parliament, CAs are locally owned and have to be initiated and supported by the councils involved. Some CAs have elected mayors.
Councillors	A councillor is somebody who is democratically elected to represent residents in their ward to the council. A ward is an area of a town or city.
Council leader ("leaders")	The Leader is the councillor who heads the largest political group represented on the council. The Leader is the most senior member of the council. They lead the decision-making process and directs strategic policy and budget setting.
County council	One of the five possible types of local authority in England. County councils cover a whole county, providing 80% of services in these areas, including education, waste disposal, transport planning, social care.
County Councils Network (CCN)	Established in 1997, the County Councils Network is a cross-party special interest group of the Local Government Association, representing England's County local authorities.
Data	Information, especially facts or numbers, collected to be examined and considered and used to help decision-making, or information in an electronic form that can be stored and used by a computer.
Data Ecosystem	The aggregate of people, organisational and cross-government resources (such as inspectorates, regulators, agencies and other bodies) engaged in collecting, recording and analysing information to understand local government performance and delivery.
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)	The government department responsible for improving and protecting the environment, growing a green economy and sustaining thriving rural communities.

Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC)	The government department responsible for investing in local areas to drive growth and create jobs, delivering the homes our country needs, supporting our community and faith groups, and overseeing local government, planning, and building safety.
Devolution	The transfer or delegation of power to a lower level, especially by central government to local or regional administration.
District council	One of the five possible types of local authority in England. District councils (sometimes called borough or city councils) cover a smaller area within a county, providing local services such as housing, environmental health, waste collection, local tax collection.
District Councils' Network (DCN)	The District Councils' Network (DCN) is a cross-party member led network of 166 councils. The DCN is a Special Interest Group of the Local Government Association (LGA), providing a single voice for all district services within the LGA.
Elected Mayors	Directly elected Mayors or Leaders in England, informally known as Metro Mayors or Leaders, are local government executive leaders who are directly elected by the residents of a local authority area (typically, but not always, a metropolitan area). Examples of metro mayors include the Mayor of London, the Mayor of Greater Manchester, and the Mayor of the West Midlands, with the first County Leaders to be elected in Norfolk and Suffolk in 2024.
English Devolution Accountability Framework (DAF)	The English Devolution Accountability framework was published on 16 March 2023 and sets out how the mayoral combined authorities and the Greater London Authority will be scrutinised and held to account by the UK Government. It will also apply to other new English institutions with devolved powers including mayoral combined county authorities and, with regard to their devolved powers, county councils and unitary authorities that have agreed and implemented devolution deals.
Input	The resources that are purchased using public money. See [Barber Report](#)
Interpreter of information	A process of using diverse analytical methods to review data and arrive at relevant conclusions.
Intervene / Intervention	A form of activity, on either a statutory or non-statutory basis, whereby central government oversees and supports a local authority that is demonstrating best value failure or the risk of future failure.

Local authorities	A local authority is an organization that is officially responsible for all the public services and facilities in a particular area.
Local Authority Data Explorer	The Local Authority Data Explorer is a tool bringing together, in one place, a selection of metrics for local government performance data that can be compared across local authorities. The aim is to improve access to and understanding of data that relates to outcomes of a local authority area.
Local Government Accountability Framework (LGAF) ("accountability framework")	Local government, through elected councillors (and, where applicable, mayors), is accountable to its local communities for the proper stewardship of all of its resources. The LGAF describes the financial controls, governance and system of scrutiny locally, that provides assurance that resources are spent properly, and in the event of failure, the availability of sector-led support and central government intervention as a last resort; as well as the mechanism by which the DLUHC Accounting Officer receives assurance that the system is functioning properly.
Local Government Association (LGA)	The LGA is the national membership body for local authorities, and they work on behalf of our member councils to support, promote and improve local government.
Local government	The administration of a particular county or district, with representatives elected by those who live there.
Localis	Localis is an independent, cross-party, leading not-for-profit think tank.
London Borough Council	A London Borough council is a type of unitary council that is responsible for all the council services in its area, and which is part of the Greater London area.
London Councils	London Councils is the collective of Local Government in London; it is the cross-party organisation that represents the interests of the 32 London boroughs and the City of London Corporation.
Metrics	Quantitative data that measure a specific aspect of local authorities' processes or performance.
Metropolitan district	A metropolitan district council (sometimes known as a city council or a metropolitan borough council) is a type of unitary council that is responsible for all the council services in its area. They are usually found in cities, and in some cases will share services with neighbouring authorities either via a joint committee or a combined authority.
Office of the department	These are distinct entities, but which form part of government departments. They can be set up for a specific project or initiative, or be long-standing, with dedicated teams with departments.

	They do not have executive agency status (and do not have the governance structures or the operational autonomy of an executive agency). They are staffed by civil servants and work within the rules and processes of their relevant home department. For example, the Office for Product Standards and Safety which is part of the Department for Business and Trade and the Unit for Future Skills which is part of the Department for Education.
Officers	Local government officers put council policies into practice and provide local services.
Officials	Civil Servants working for a UK Government Department.
Outcome	The intended impact of spending public money, i.e. the objectives sought by government. They can be either direct (usually measurable and timely – e.g. NHS waiting times) or indirect (causality usually difficult to determine, and may have a time lag). See Barber Report.
Output	The good or services produced from inputs (activities may be substituted where outputs are difficult to measure). See Barber Report.
Outcomes based approach	In his 2017 report Delivering Better Outcomes for Citizens Sir Michael Barber argued for a move towards measuring outcomes, and the intended impact of public investment rather than process - inputs (resources) and outputs (good or services) - which the public sector tends to measure. Outcome measures are important because they give us an idea of the value created when public money is translated into outputs and outcomes which are welfare enhancing, improving people's lives and economic wellbeing.
Parish council	Parish and town councils are the first tier of elected local government, and have the same distinct powers, each under an Act of Parliament, from the ability to own and manage allotments and cemeteries to village greens. A town council is otherwise a parish council that has usually decided to have a mayor and call itself a town council.
Reporting Framework	This is a set of standards used to decide on the measurement, recognition, presentation, and disclosure of all significant elements of Oflog.
Sector bodies and organisations	Professional bodies and organisations that represent the interests of the local government sector, including Local Government Association Special Interest Groups.

Service Delivery	A measure of the performance quality level delivered by service providers such as productivity, effectiveness and efficiency
Special Interest Group of Municipal Authorities (SIGOMA)	SIGOMA is the Special Interest Group of Municipal Authorities representing 47 urban authorities in the northern, midland and south-coast regions of England.
Soft indicator	Describes indicators related to the value or performance of a which deviate from traditional "hard" metrics. These may not adhere to such rigorous analytical criteria but can still provide valuable insight. This will likely take the form of a group of both qualitative and quantitative data that will support a better (and earlier) assessment of what authorities are most at risk – and importantly therefore, what support can be provided to prevent potential failure
Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE)	A membership body for local government and public sector professionals throughout the UK.
Statutory duties of local authorities	Local authorities in England have a statutory duty to provide a range of services to their communities. These include: education services; children's safeguarding and social care; adult social care; waste collection; planning and housing services; road maintenance; and library services.
Statutory officers	The senior officers that a local authority is required by law to appoint. They are defined in the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, s 296 as: Head of Paid Service; Monitoring Officer; Director of Children's Services; Director of Adult Social Services; and Section 151 Officer.
Service areas	Groups of metrics relating to a single policy area that Oflog will report on E.g., Adult social care, waste management etc.
Sector ("the sector")	Refer to 'local government.'
The Single Data List	The Single Data List is a catalogue that lists all the datasets that local government is required to submit to central government. Local authorities are not obliged to provide any data which is not on the list without extra funding.

Stewardship	. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has responsibility as owner of the local government accountability framework (LGAF) to monitoring local authority risk including governance, financial management and delivery of key services and adherence to the Best Value duty.
Town council	Refer to 'parish council.'
Trailblazer devolution deals	Trailblazer deals involve devolving more powers to mayoral authorities in England and simplifying their funding arrangements.
Unitary council	A unitary authority is a local authority responsible for all local government functions within its area or performing additional functions that elsewhere are usually performed by a higher level of sub-national government or the national government.
Unitary Councils Network (UCN)	A Local Government Association Special Interest Group representing unitary councils which aims to promote, support and represent the aims and ambitions of the unitary councils of England.