

Appendix

Low-stakes accountability and public service turnarounds

by Thomas Elston and Han Wang

Table A1: Summary statistics

	(1) Obs	(2) Mean	(3) SD	(4) Min	(5) Max
Panel A: performance turnaround					
Investigated upheld complaints (#)	1064	5.347	5.904	0.000	44.000
Complaints not accepted for investigation (#)	1064	6.553	6.183	0.000	39.000
Panel B: tunnel vision					
Delayed discharge from NHS due to:					
awaiting assessment completion (#)	1041	140.547	188.934	0.000	1448.750
awaiting public funding (#)	1041	31.482	43.057	0.000	421.417
discharge dispute (0/1)	1064	0.851	0.357	0.000	1.000
Ease of finding info & advice on support (%)	1028	51.193	8.673	29.800	95.300
Satisfaction with care services (%)	1025	89.840	2.926	68.200	98.600
Impact of social care on quality of life (%)	1027	91.327	3.007	70.400	97.500
Encouragement and support as carer (%)	1048	29.421	5.191	13.000	46.100
Satisfaction with social services support (%)	1048	66.042	10.150	35.700	89.500
Panel C: leadership attention					
Key decisions (#)	530	1.232	1.765	0.000	12.000
Non-key decisions (#)	530	1.311	3.112	0.000	24.000
Panel D: organizational centralization					
Audit days (#)	642	99.004	97.467	0.000	665.000
Panel E: core competencies					
All workforce (#)	1029	254.289	219.232	0.000	1675.000
Frontline workforce (#)	1019	122.589	115.710	0.000	808.000
Supervisor workforce (#)	1019	40.763	39.489	0.000	343.000
Professional workforce (#)	1019	41.075	29.010	0.000	257.000
Panel F: managerial turnover					
Turnover of the director of adult care (0/1)	1023	0.319	0.466	0.000	1.000
Panel G: population demographics					
Rate of health problems in the population (%)	1048	0.129	0.024	0.000	0.364
Adult rate in the population (%)	1048	0.802	0.050	0.276	0.993

Table A2: Data sources

Variable	Data source
Panel A: performance turnaround	
Investigated upheld complaints (#)	1. The Ombudsman’s case management data: https://www.lgo.org.uk/
Complaints not accepted for investigation (#)	
Panel B: tunnel vision	
Delayed discharge from NHS due to: awaiting assessment completion (#)	2. Delayed transfers of care: https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/delayed-transfers-of-care/
awaiting public funding (#)	
discharge dispute (0/1)	
Ease of finding info & advice on support (%)	3. Adult social care survey: https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/personal-social-services-adult-social-care-survey
Satisfaction with care services (%)	
Impact of social care on quality of life (%)	4. Personal social services survey of adult carers: https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/personal-social-services-survey-of-adult-carers
Encouragement and support as carer (%)	
Satisfaction with social services support (%)	
Panel C: leadership attention	
Key decisions (#)	5. The decisions page of each council: councils’ websites
Non-key decisions (#)	
Panel D: organizational centralization	
Audit days (#)	6. The internal audit plans page of each council: councils' websites
Panel E: core competencies	
All workforce (#)	7. Personal social services: staff of social services departments: https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/personal-social-services-staff-of-social-services-departments
Frontline workforce (#)	
Supervisor workforce (#)	
Professional workforce (#)	
Panel F: managerial turnover	
Turnover of the director of adult care (0/1)	8. Municipal yearbook: British library
Panel G: population demographics	
Rate of health problems in the population (%)	9. Adult population survey: https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/sources/aps
Adult rate in the population (%)	

Multiple treatments

As noted in the article, several councils receive two or even three public interest reports related to adult social care during our study period. Six of these “multiple treatments” are for differing kinds of failure (assessment and care planning, charging and direct payments, and safeguarding), while seven cases involved second notifications for repeating the same type of failure.¹ To account for these two types of multiple treatments in our DiD estimation, we implemented two specific strategies.

First, for councils censured in different subcategories, we refined our analysis to the council–service category–year level. The treatment variable equals 1 for a given council–service category in all years following the first censure in that category, and remains 0 otherwise. Other service categories within the same council remain untreated during this period. Table A3 reports the estimates: Columns 1 and 2 use the number of upheld complaints as the outcome variable, controlling for local authority–category fixed effects and year fixed effects. The results remain consistent with the main council–year level analysis reported in Table 2 in the main article. Notably, the council–service category–year level analysis allows us to disaggregate the estimated effects by service category, providing insight into how each category responds to the issuance of a public interest report in terms of maladministration. Figure A3 (later in this appendix) shows that, while all three categories exhibit clear reductions in upheld complaints following a censure, the effect is most pronounced in the safeguarding category, whereas the effect in assessment and care planning is relatively weak.

¹ As noted in the main text, the original count of multiple-treated councils is 16. However, three of these councils were excluded during the CEM matching process. Therefore, only 13 multiple-treated councils are included in the analysis.

Table A3: Robustness check: Effects of low-stakes accountability on performance turnaround at council-category level

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Investigated upheld cases		Not accepted for investigation	
Panel A				
Post report releasing	-0.718** (0.279) [0.010]	-0.741*** (0.280) [0.008]	0.239 (0.235) [0.310]	0.228 (0.225) [0.311]
Panel B				
Year 0	-0.529** (0.252) [0.036]	-0.507** (0.257) [0.048]	0.256 (0.171) [0.134]	0.263 (0.166) [0.113]
Year 1	-0.778*** (0.281) [0.006]	-0.816*** (0.272) [0.003]	0.166 (0.223) [0.455]	0.152 (0.221) [0.491]
Year 2	-0.750** (0.318) [0.018]	-0.765** (0.324) [0.018]	0.340 (0.246) [0.167]	0.343 (0.229) [0.134]
Year 3	-0.816 (0.524) [0.119]	-0.875* (0.517) [0.091]	0.192 (0.385) [0.617]	0.155 (0.383) [0.687]
Local authority-category				
FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓
Demographic control		✓		✓
Empirical method	CEM+DiD	CEM+DiD	CEM+DiD	CEM+DiD
Observations	3,192	3,144	3,192	3,144

Notes: The unit of observation is the local authority-category × year. Post report releasing is a dummy that is 1 if local authority-category has received the report, and 0 otherwise. Post is a dummy that is 1 if the year is after the report releasing. Standard errors clustered at the local authority level. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. Standard errors are reported in parentheses, and p-values in square brackets.

Second, to address councils receiving more than one censure within the same service category, we extended the council–service category–year level analysis by creating a new variable, second report releasing, which equals 1 in all years after the second censure in the same category and 0 otherwise. Given the limitations of Callaway and Sant’Anna’s (2021) group-time average treatment effect estimator in handling multiple treatments, we instead

adopted the standard stacked DiD approach commonly used in recent staggered DiD studies.² Table A4 presents the results: Column 1 includes both the first report releasing and second report releasing indicators, showing that the effect of the second censure is statistically insignificant. To further validate this finding, Column 2 interacts the two indicators to test for a triple-difference effect, which likewise proves insignificant. These findings suggest that, conditional on an initial censure, a subsequent censure in the same service category does not generate additional measurable effects.

Table A4: Robustness check: Effects of low-stakes accountability on performance turnaround at council-category level, accommodating second censure

	(1)	(2)
	Investigated upheld cases	
First report releasing	-0.593*** (0.182) [0.001]	-0.593*** (0.182) [0.001]
Second report releasing	-0.233 (0.222) [0.294]	
First report releasing × Second report releasing		-0.233 (0.222) [0.294]
Report releasing wave		
× Local authority-category FEs	✓	✓
× Year FEs	✓	✓
Demographic control	✓	✓
Empirical method	✓	✓
Observations	22,296	22,296

Notes: The unit of observation is the report releasing wave × local authority-category × year. First report releasing and second report releasing are dummies that are 1 if local authority has received the report, and 0 otherwise. Standard errors clustered at the local authority level. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. Standard errors are reported in parentheses, and p-values in square brackets.

² Technical details of the stacked DiD approach can be found in Elston et al. (2024).

Table A5: Robustness check: Effects of low-stakes accountability on performance turnaround, excluding never treated group

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Investigated upheld cases		Not accepted for investigation	
Panel A				
Post report releasing	-1.093*** (0.396) [0.006]	-1.117** (0.476) [0.019]	0.294 (0.329) [0.372]	0.451 (0.333) [0.176]
Panel B				
Year 0	-0.832** (0.358) [0.020]	-0.787* (0.419) [0.060]	0.328 (0.268) [0.220]	0.498* (0.264) [0.059]
Year 1	-1.027*** (0.365) [0.005]	-0.988** (0.412) [0.016]	-0.026 (0.403) [0.948]	0.403 (0.328) [0.220]
Year 2	-1.503*** (0.579) [0.009]	-1.569 (0.980) [0.109]	0.548 (0.359) [0.126]	0.469 (0.348) [0.177]
Year 3	-1.008 (0.667) [0.131]	-1.123 (0.744) [0.131]	0.325 (0.504) [0.519]	0.434 (0.578) [0.452]
Local authority FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓
Demographic control		✓		✓
Empirical method	CEM+DiD	CEM+DiD	CEM+DiD	CEM+DiD
Observations	322	322	322	322

Notes: The unit of observation is the local authority × year. Post report releasing is a dummy that is 1 if local authority has received the report, and 0 otherwise. Post is a dummy that is 1 if the year is after the report releasing. Standard errors clustered at the local authority level. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. Standard errors are reported in parentheses, and p-values in square brackets.

Table A6: Effects of low-stakes accountability on leadership attention

	(1) Key decisions	(2) Non-key decisions
Panel A		
Post report releasing	1.314* (0.711) [0.065]	-0.449 (0.550) [0.414]
Panel B		
Year 0	0.717 (0.710) [0.313]	-0.406 (0.576) [0.481]
Year 1	1.550* (0.797) [0.052]	-0.446 (0.553) [0.420]
Year 2	2.125** (0.925) [0.022]	-0.157 (0.669) [0.815]
Year 3	0.862 (1.165) [0.459]	-0.787 (0.932) [0.398]
Local authority FEs	✓	✓
Year FEs	✓	✓
Demographic control	✓	✓
Empirical method	CEM+DiD	CEM+DiD
Observations	530	530

Notes: The unit of observation is the local authority × year. Post report releasing is a dummy that is 1 if local authority has received the report, and 0 otherwise. Post is a dummy that is 1 if the year is after the report releasing. Standard errors clustered at the local authority level. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. Standard errors are reported in parentheses, and p-values in square brackets.

Table A7: Effects of low-stakes accountability on centralization

	(1) Audit days
Panel A	
Post report releasing	1.108 (0.700) [0.114]
Panel B	
Year 0	0.606 (0.468) [0.196]
Year 1	0.999 (0.984) [0.310]
Year 2	1.694* (0.918) [0.065]
Year 3	1.135 (1.462) [0.437]
Local authority FEs	✓
Year FEs	✓
Demographic control	✓
Empirical method	CEM+DiD
Observations	951

Notes: The unit of observation is the local authority × year. Post report releasing is a dummy that is 1 if local authority has received the report, and 0 otherwise. Post is a dummy that is 1 if the year is after the report releasing. Standard errors clustered at the local authority level. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. Standard errors are reported in parentheses, and p-values in square brackets.

Table A8: Effects of low-stakes accountability on turnover of the social care director

	(1)
	Turnover of the director
Panel A	
Post report releasing	0.034 (0.093) [0.717]
Panel B	
Year 0	0.099 (0.101) [0.327]
Year 1	0.030 (0.117) [0.796]
Year 2	-0.057 (0.126) [0.650]
Year 3	0.062 (0.134) [0.643]
Local authority FEs	✓
Year FEs	✓
Demographic control	✓
Empirical method	CEM+DiD
Observations	1,012

Notes: The unit of observation is the local authority × year. Post report releasing is a dummy that is 1 if local authority has received the report, and 0 otherwise. Post is a dummy that is 1 if the year is after the report releasing. Standard errors clustered at the local authority level. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. Standard errors are reported in parentheses, and p-values in square brackets.

Table A9: Effects of low-stakes accountability, moderating effect of urgency

	(1)	(2)
	Investigated upheld cases	
	Δ Frontline (year 0 vs. Prior 3-year) > National avg.	Δ Frontline (year 0 vs. Prior 3-year) < National avg.
Panel A		
Post report releasing	-1.515*** (0.412) [0.000]	-0.296 (0.330) [0.369]
Panel B		
Year 0	-0.958*** (0.368) [0.009]	-0.325 (0.400) [0.417]
Year 1	-1.577*** (0.442) [0.000]	-0.549 (0.393) [0.162]
Year 2	-1.566*** (0.538) [0.004]	-0.241 (0.350) [0.491]
Year 3	-1.959** (0.895) [0.029]	-0.070 (0.450) [0.876]
Local authority FEs	✓	✓
Year FEs	✓	✓
Demographic control	✓	✓
Empirical method	CEM+DiD	CEM+DiD
Observations	951	963

Notes: The unit of observation is the local authority \times year. Post report releasing is a dummy that is 1 if local authority has received the report, and 0 otherwise. Post is a dummy that is 1 if the year is after the report releasing. Standard errors clustered at the local authority level. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$. Standard errors are reported in parentheses, and p-values in square brackets.

Figure A1: Correlations of council characteristics between 2012 and 2013-2019

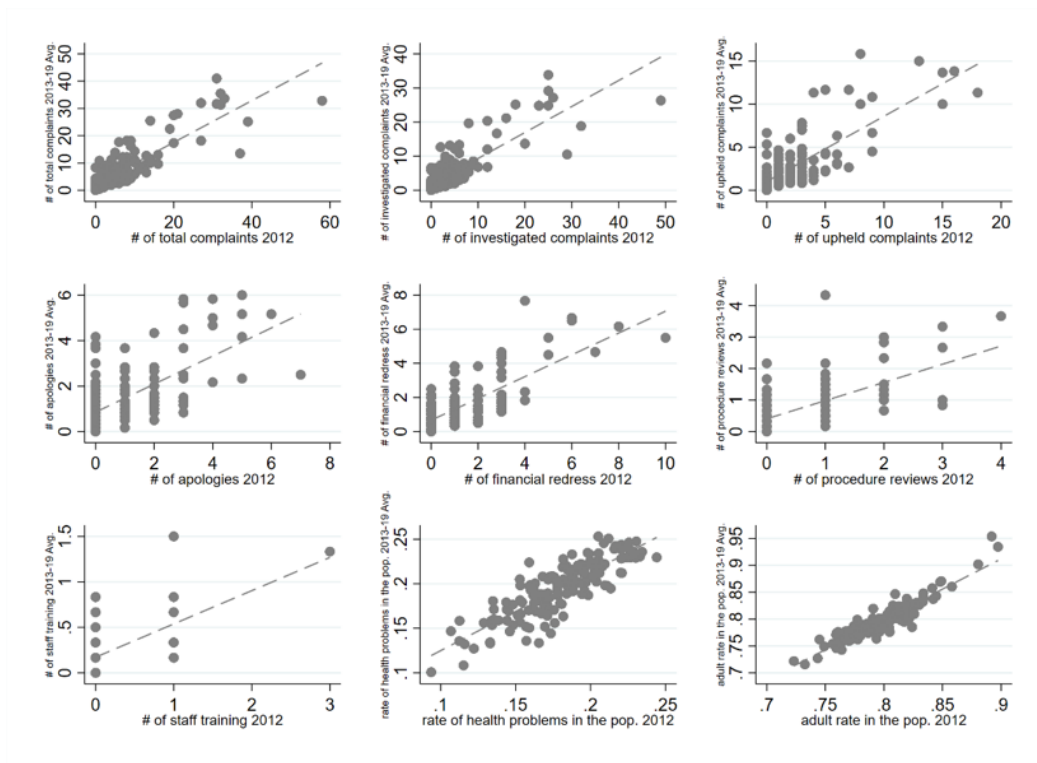


Figure A2: Event study - Performance turnaround in censured vs. non-censured councils at council-category level analysis

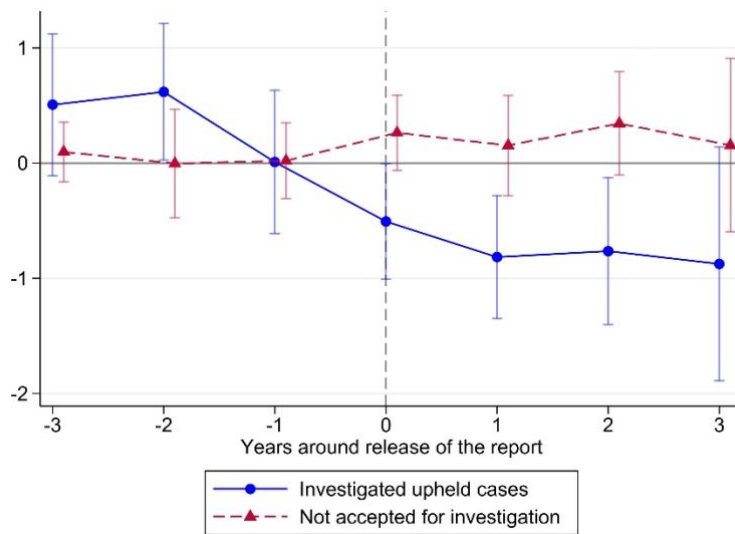


Figure A3: Event study - Performance turnaround in censured vs. non-censured councils across service categories

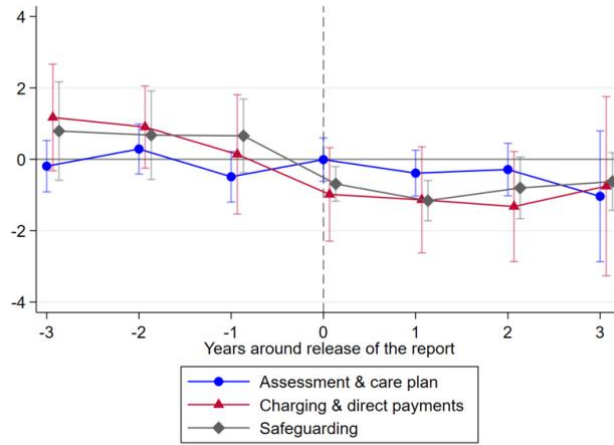


Figure A4: Event study - Performance turnaround in censured vs. non-censured councils, excluding never treated group

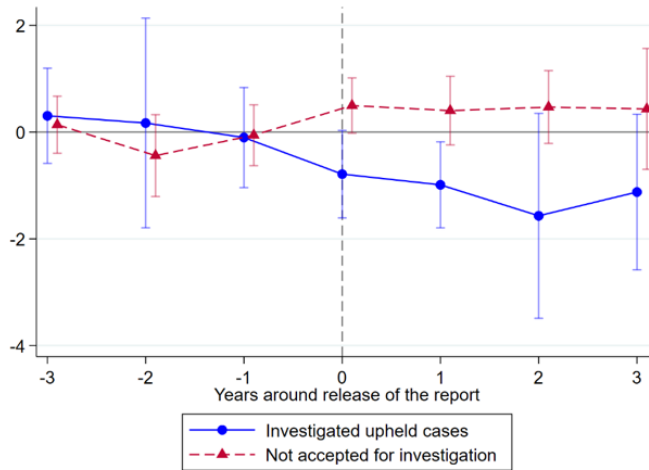


Figure A5: Event study - Core competencies in censured vs. non-censured councils across service categories

