

Priorities for the LGA's Improvement programme for 2017/18 onwards

Purpose

For discussion and direction.

Summary

This report invites the Board to offer initial comments and guidance of the overall shape and content of the LGA's improvement/support offer to the sector for 2017/18. The support programme is funded through DCLG grant and discussions with DCLG about the shape of the programme for 2017/18 will commence soon. It is important that the LGA is able to enter these discussions with a clear understanding of the sector's support needs.

Recommendation

Members are asked to offer their suggestions on the potential support needs of the sector over 2017/18 and beyond, to help shape the LGA's improvement programme.

Action

Officers to take action as directed by members.

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Background

1. The LGA's programme of improvement support to the sector is funded by DCLG and set out in a detailed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) agreed between LGA and DCLG. The agreement with DCLG is for one year only and amounts to £21.4m in 2016/17. The main improvement grant has reduced by over 50% since 2010/11 and in 2015/16 stood at £23.4m.
2. Up until 2016/17 the improvement work of the LGA was funded through a top-slice of the revenue support grant allocated to local authorities. 2016/17 marked a change from top-slice to DCLG grant funding.
3. Discussions with DCLG will soon begin about shape of the programme for 17/18. It will be important for the LGA to enter these discussions with a clear understanding of the sector's support needs and an ability to articulate a clear set of improvement priorities – and we would welcome members' guidance and advice on this.

Current improvement priorities

4. Currently the MOU is based around 4 themes, which in summary are:
 - 4.1. **Peer support and challenge:** This is the theme under which the vast majority of our peer support and peer challenge work is covered. A tiered approach to the peer based model has been introduced, recognising that whilst most support offers will be universal some councils will sometimes face more significant challenges and will require more bespoke support.
 - 4.2. **Efficiency and Productivity:** Increasingly councils are looking to the LGA for support in managing their costs and demand pressures. Our efficiency and productivity programme provides a range of support to help councils in these areas ranging from the creation of procurement frameworks through to the use of productivity experts which provide support such as renegotiating contracts with suppliers. This year's programme is estimated to help councils save in excess of £75m. In addition this theme includes LG Inform, our benchmarking tool, our work on innovation, digital and data issues as well as support to Local Partnerships.
 - 4.3. **Strong Political and Senior Officer Leadership:** The LGA's political leadership programme provides direct support to improve the skills of councillors across local government. The programme includes our Leadership Academy and Leadership Essential programmes which provide development opportunities for over 700 councillors. Also included in this area are our Next Generation and "Be A Councillor" programmes. Whilst the focus of the programme is on councillor development we also deliver our national graduate development programme through this theme and are supporting 75 councils on workforce issues. New to the programme this year is work to support councils deliver their apprenticeship targets.
 - 4.4. **Strong Communities with Excellent Public Services:** This is the theme under which we provide our support on devolution and all the machinery associated with the pay negotiations. In addition, this theme includes a range of other thematic or

service specific issues including improvement support on flooding, housing and community cohesion.

Priorities for 17/18 onwards

5. The LGA has embarked on a process of engaging the sector to capture what the improvement priorities should be in future years.
6. This has included discussions at the LGA's Member Peer Conference held in September and attended by over 100 senior councillors; the LGA's Chief Executive Sounding Board; at regional meetings; and through the discussions that the LGA's Principal Advisors have with members and senior officers on a regular basis.
7. Feedback from the sector about the improvement support continues to be very positive. Peer challenge and support; the leadership work developing councillors together with specific support to help councils to deliver savings are all still highly thought of and considered to be at the core of any improvement offer going forward.
8. In terms of new offers a number of councils have come forward to suggest that there is a need to develop an offer around housing and particularly the rising cost of temporary accommodation in councils facing an increase in homelessness. In addition, whilst outside the core remit of DCLG funding, it is also the case that an increasing number of councils are looking for support around children's services – both in terms of service performance but also cost as demand pressures are impacting on many councils budget position.

Issues

9. We would welcome members' contributions and suggestions to help develop and shape the improvement programme for 2017/18.
10. Some discussion questions:
 - 10.1. What outcomes should we be seeking to achieve?
 - 10.2. Does our offer match what councils are concerned about?
 - 10.2.1. Does anything need to change or stop?
 - 10.2.2. Support for "all needs" or concentrate on a few specific areas?
 - 10.3. Are there specific areas that we should prioritise for our efficiency and productivity programme? For example should we do more to help councils with the pressures on adult social care or temporary accommodation?
 - 10.4. Will Brexit have any implications for future improvement priorities?

Implications for Wales

11. There are no specific implications for Wales.

Financial implications

12. There are no additional financial implications arising from the report.

Next steps

13. In previous years the government has indicated the amount of improvement grant as part of the provisional local government finance settlement in late November/early December. Whilst the settlement in November 2015 did not set out a grant figure for 2016/17 it did include confirmation that sufficient resources had been set aside to enable sector-led improvement to continue and that it was the Government's intention to announce funding to IDeA, following negotiations. We are seeking similar reassurances for 2017/18 and continue to promote the case for a three year grant commitment.
14. In terms of timing we will continue to work with the sector to develop a clear sense of improvement priorities for 2017/18 and expect to engage DCLG in the New Year with a view to agreeing grant funding for 2017/18 by the beginning of that financial year. Progress reports will be brought to the Improvement and Innovation Board and IDeA Board in January.