

## **National Graduate Development Programme**

### **Purpose of report**

For discussion.

### **Summary**

The national graduate development programme (ngdp), is the LGA's flagship management trainee programme. It has been providing future managerial leaders to the sector for two decades and in 2017 recruited the nineteenth cohort. As recruitment for the twentieth cohort of national management trainees gets underway, it is timely to provide Members with an update on the progress of the scheme and present considerations for the future success of ngdp.

The purpose of this report is to provide the Improvement and Innovation Board with an update on ngdp. There will be a presentation to support the discussion.

### **Recommendation**

That the Innovation and Improvement Board to comment on ngdp and asked to endorse and champion the programme, promoting it to the sector and within their own organisations (paragraph 7).

### **Action**

Officers to proceed with work as directed by members.

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## **National Graduate Development Programme**

### **Background**

1. The ngdp is the LGA's flagship management trainee programme. It offers local authorities a unique opportunity to grow their own local government managerial leaders. Every year since 1999, ngdp has provided the sector with high quality graduates who are ready to work on strategic projects which contribute to the delivery of corporate goals of individual authorities.
2. The ngdp is a two year programme, where graduates are employed by local authorities and undertake a minimum of three placements. Alongside their employment, the LGA has commissioned the Solace Group to deliver a complementary learning and development offer. At the end of their two year programme the graduates will have developed a range of skills across of a variety of services. The ngdp acts as an opportunity for talented graduates to fast track their local government career and gives authorities the opportunity to nurture and develop their own talent.

### **Looking to the future**

3. Being part of the ngdp allows local authorities to start thinking earlier about longer-term succession planning and future leadership potential. This report will outline some of the recent key developments within the ngdp and highlight some of the opportunities for the future.

### **Recruitment**

4. Every year, the LGA undertakes an extensive recruitment campaign to attract graduates. Graduate recruitment can be time-consuming and demanding on council resources and by joining ngdp, local authorities have access to a national pool of candidates, without the burden of managing a full assessment and recruitment process. There is a rigorous five stage recruitment process which includes verbal, numerical and situational judgement tests, video interviewing, assessment centres and a "best-fit" interview with councils. Applications closed for Cohort 20 on 4 January 2018 and over 2,700 applications were submitted. This represents 7.5% increase compared to 2017 applications, and an increase in annual applications of over 70% compared to 2015.
5. Shortlisting is currently underway for the video interview stage, and it is anticipated that approximately 800 candidates will progress. The national assessment centres are taking place between 1 March and 16 March in London and Preston. The final number of places available on ngdp is determined by the involvement of participating authorities.

## **Council involvement**

6. In recent years between 50 and 60 councils have participated in the ngdp per year. It is a demonstrable example of how a national platform and national resources can create a more efficient way of approaching graduate recruitment than if individual councils undertook the task separately. In 2017, the Leadership & Localism team placed 130 graduates in councils across England. Attached at **Appendix B** is the list of participating councils for the past three years to provide Members with an overview of the spread of local authority participation. The ngdp is funded by a combination of the improvement grant received from MHCLG and a fee, paid by participating authorities. Work is underway to engage more local authorities in ngdp to ensure that as much of the sector as possible has access to the benefits of the ngdp offer. However, any increase in the numbers increases the overall cost of the programme at a time when the improvement grant from MHCLG is reducing.
7. The approach to attracting councils has included articles in the Chief Executive's Bulletin, regional open days, an article in First magazine. A Council Information Guide was also produced and is used by the regional teams in their discussions with the sector. Raising the profile of ngdp is crucial to ensure that all local authorities are aware that the opportunity to partake is available to them. Members of the Improvement and Innovation Board are requested to champion ngdp, as part of the LGA's sector led improvement offer and it is requested that they promote the benefits of ngdp in their own organisation and across local government.
8. Registration from host authorities is accepted until 30 March 2018, and graduates will start in their roles in the Autumn of 2018. Following the recruitment process, managed by the LGA, host authorities will directly employ successful graduates on a two-year fixed term contract and offer a minimum starting salary of £24,174 (not including London weighting).

## **Benefits of ngdp**

9. Included at **Appendix A** is a recent testimonial provided by Cllr Hazel Simmonds, the Leader of Luton Borough Council, which is due to be published in the February edition of First Magazine. Having first recruited one graduate through ngdp in Cohort 18 (2016), Luton Borough Council have gone on to recruit four in 2017 and have undertaken an extensive local recruitment campaign in 2018 to attract Luton residents to join ngdp. This testimonial demonstrates the benefits of ngdp from the point of view of a specific host council. Other benefits, include:

- 9.1 Future proofing: Being part of the ngdp allows host authorities to start thinking about longer-term succession planning and future leadership potential;
- 9.2 Management trainees have access to national networking and learning opportunities across sectors and have access to partners such as central government, the private sector and other local authorities. This not only enriches the experience for the trainee, but also brings a wealth of best practice and knowledge back to the authority;
- 9.3 Recruiting: graduate recruitment can be time consuming and demanding on council resources, which is why we run a national marketing and recruitment campaign to help identify the most promising future leaders for authorities.
- 9.4 Learning and development: as part of our offer, trainees will complete a bespoke and comprehensive learning and development programme. More information is provided in the following section of this report.

### **Learning and development**

- 10. Since last reporting to the Improvement and Innovation Board, a new learning and development programme has been procured. To ensure that the future managers going through the ngdp are equipped and ready for senior roles at the conclusion of the two year programme, a bespoke learning and development opportunity has been designed. Working in partnership with the Solace Group, trainees are provided with a mixture of residential training modules, regional events, online learning and action learning sessions. Delegates will also complete an ILM Level 7 Certificate in leadership and management while on the programme.

### **Next steps and future developments**

- 11. The ngdp is currently funded through the improvement grant received from MHCLG (roughly £5,000 per graduate) and a fee from participating councils. The fee for participation in 2018 is £2,400 per graduate, which is a £50 increase on the previous year. The cost of the ngdp has not risen by more than 2.2% per year in an effort to ensure the scheme remains affordable and below inflation during the challenging financial climate.
- 12. As interest and engagement in ngdp grows, it is important to ensure that it remains sustainable. As the number of graduates increase the current funding model requires a larger amount of MHCLG grant. However, the overall level of improvement grant continues to reduce each year. Therefore, there is a need to look at what a sustainable funding model is going forward. Put simply, the portion of DCLG grant given to ngdp is spread quite generously amongst 50-60 councils. If all council's eligible to participate chose to do so, the cost of delivering ngdp would increase significantly

13. Substantial work has been undertaken to ensure that the cost of delivering ngdp represents the best possible value to the sector. This has ensured that the fees paid by participating councils to top up the DCLG grant has not needed to increase significantly in recent years. To ensure the future financial sustainability of ngdp, the fee will likely need to increase at some point alongside continued efforts to deliver a good value scheme, without adversely affecting the quality of the programme.
14. Work is currently underway to consider future funding options for ngdp. Consideration was given to aligning ngdp with the government's new apprenticeship levy, however, in reality this would involve significantly changing what is a successful and well-regarded talent attraction programme. It is intended that a series of conversations with senior leaders will take place during 2018 to seek the views of councils participating, previously participating councils, as well as those who have not had any involvement in ngdp to date. The responses would gather responses to inform future developments of the programme.

#### **Implications for Wales**

15. There are no implications for Wales.

#### **Financial Implications**

16. There are no direct financial implications of this report. Significant work has been undertaken to ensure that ngdp represents best value for the sector and it is proposed that work regarding the financial sustainability of ngdp is presented to IIB at a future date.

#### **Next steps**

17. Following the conversations and research referred to in paragraph 14, it is proposed that a further update is provide to IIB members.