

Sector led improvement: Evaluation

Purpose of report

For discussion.

Summary

This report updates members on the progress of the current evaluation of sector led improvement and the emerging pattern of results at the half way stage.

Recommendation

That the Improvement and Innovation Board consider the evaluation findings to date and offer advice.

Action

Officers to complete the evaluation programme, keeping the Board informed of progress.

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Sector led improvement: Evaluation

Background

1. Between 2012 and 2014, an evaluation of sector led improvement (SLI) and the LGA's offer was carried out. The evaluation was extensive and consisted of a wide range of individual pieces of work that measured the perception of and support for SLI, as well as evaluations of SLI support such as the Leadership Academy and Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC). The full results were published in the report, 'Evaluation of Sector-led Improvement' here: <https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/our-improvement-offer/evaluation-sector-led-improvement>
2. Since publication of the evaluation in 2014, we have strengthened the approach to SLI in the light of the results of the wide ranging consultation with the sector. In addition there is a strong expectation from MHCLG that we will continue to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the approach.
3. Accordingly in May 2016 the Improvement and Innovation Board agreed to carry out a second phase of evaluation of SLI, to be carried out over the following four years (2016-2020) with the main aim of helping us understand whether, in the context of reduced resources within the sector:
 - 3.1. the SLI approach has the continued confidence and engagement of the sector and as a result, the trust of the public
 - 3.2. the LGA's support has had a positive impact on the sector's capacity to improve itself.
4. A further key aim of the evaluation is to provide information that will enable the LGA to continue to refine and improve the approach and support offer to the sector.

Progress

5. It was always envisaged that an 'interim' report, summarising the key messages from research and analysis undertaken in the first two years, and including the results of the LGA's annual perceptions survey and public opinion polling, would be drawn together at the half way stage, in 2018.
6. The interim evaluation report is **attached**, and has also been published here: <https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/our-improvement-offer/evaluation-sector-led-improvement>. The evaluation draws on a mixture of specific pieces of evaluation research (whether undertaken internally or commissioned from external providers) and the results of our analysis of feedback from participants/councils.
7. Key findings:
 - 7.1. The sector has a strong and increasing commitment to the SLI approach. Since 2012, there has been a 19 percentage point increase in the proportion of

respondents to the LGA perceptions survey saying that sector led improvement is the right approach.

- 7.2. Sector led improvement is effective: 87 per cent of respondents to the 2017 LGA perceptions survey said that LGA improvement support has had a positive impact on their authority (an increase from 83 per cent in 2016). This increases to 95 per cent among chief executives and 96 per cent among leaders.
 - 7.3. Despite the significant reduction in resources sector performance continues to improve. Analysis of metrics covering the full range of local government activity was carried out in early 2018, to provide an objective assessment of local government performance since 2009/10. This showed a positive direction of travel, with nearly three quarters (70 per cent) of these metrics having seen an improvement over the period.
 - 7.4. Since 2013 when this question was introduced in the LGA's public polling, public trust in local councils has consistently been far greater than trust in the government, when it comes to making decisions about how services are provided in local areas. Nearly three quarters of respondents to the July 2018 round of public polling (72 per cent) said they most trusted their local council whilst 17 per cent most trusted the government and nine per cent answered 'neither'.
8. The evaluation provides firm evidence to demonstrate the impact of the support provided, for example:
- 8.1. CPC impact: We surveyed councils that received a CPC during 2016/17 to assess the impact nearly a year later, once councils had had a chance to act on the findings and to reflect on the process. We found that:
 - 8.1.1. Eighty per cent of respondents said that the CPC had a great or moderate positive impact on delivery of their council's priorities.
 - 8.1.2. Nearly three quarters (72 per cent) said that the CPC had a great or moderate positive impact on the external reputation of their council.
 - 8.2. Leadership Essentials impact: we surveyed councillors who had attended a Leadership Essentials course during 2017/18 to see what long term impact attendance had had. The surveys were conducted several months after each course, to give attendees the chance to reflect upon the learning and put it in to practice.
 - 8.2.1. The majority of respondents (92 per cent) said attending the Leadership Essentials course had helped them improve the way they carried out their role, to either a great or moderate extent.
 - 8.2.2. Thirty one per cent had progressed to a new role or taken on additional roles or responsibilities since attending Leadership Essentials – of which 82 per cent

said their participation in the programme had a great or moderate positive impact on their ability to do this.

8.3. Support from the productivity programme has helped councils tackle a number of issues including transforming services, smarter sourcing and generating income. For example, an independent evaluation of the Productivity Experts Programme estimated that the programme supported projects which achieved financial benefits in the vicinity of £133 million over 25 projects, including both achieved and expected future benefits.

9. The evaluation report provides us with a good opportunity to reinforce the support, benefits and effectiveness of sector led improvement.

Implications for Wales

10. There are no implications for Wales. Improvement work is provided directly by the WLGA.

Financial Implications

11. There are no additional financial implications arising from this report

Next steps

12. The results provide us with evidence to continue to promote the benefits and effectiveness of sector led improvement and highlight the continuing support for the approach within the sector.

13. A 'final' report will be available in 2020 – this will summarise the key messages from all the research and analysis that will have taken place between 2016 and 2020.