

Improvement and Innovation Board - End of Year report

Improvement

1. This year we have seen the successful delivery of a wide-ranging improvement offer. We achieved a 20 per cent increase in the number of peer challenges delivered, with highly positive impacts reported, and organised the most ambitious Innovation Zone programme yet. In addition we helped the sector respond to in-year developments such as EU Exit preparedness and the aftermath of the Novichok attack in Salisbury.
2. Our approach to improvement, developed in collaboration with the sector, provides different tiers of support depending on the intensity of the challenges faced locally. Our regionally-based team of **Principal Advisers** act as the focal point for discussions with councils about their improvement needs and the help we can make available. We work on the basis that every council and fire and rescue service will have a corporate peer challenge or finance peer review (at no cost) at least every four to five years. We also expect participating councils to publish the peer challenge report, to produce an action plan, and to have a follow-up visit.
3. We ran our seventh successful **Innovation Zone** at our Annual Conference this year involving over 70 speakers, representing innovative work from 37 organisations. Improvement and Innovation Board members helped compere the Zone programme and speak in the new 'open mic' session. The Zone with the theme of 'Taking the Plunge' was opened by Design Council and featured a huge array of interaction sessions, including robotics, care dogs and a silent disco. Hundreds of delegates visited the Zone and case studies will be uploaded to the LGA website to further share learning with others.
4. Working through the LGA's Lead Member Peers and Principal Advisers, we have provided **targeted support to individual councils** and groups of councils, for example: change of control support to 33 councils, bespoke peer mentoring support to 14 councils experiencing significant governance issues, and support to 40 councils to improve their engagement with communities. We have also supported the Centre for Public Scrutiny, which has helped 68 councils to develop their scrutiny skills and expertise.
5. During 2018/19 145 **peer challenges** have been delivered, a 20 per cent increase compared to last year. These challenges covered a range of different areas including finance, fire, children's and adults services, as well as 71 corporate peer challenges. This year we secured 2,500 days from member and officer peers to support the peer challenge process, representing a considerable investment by the sector in its own improvement. We have also delivered 10 peer training and development events during the year as we seek to widen and refresh our pool of member and officer peers.
6. Our evaluation of the corporate peer challenge programme found that 94 per cent of Chief Executive respondents of authorities participating in the past year said it had a positive impact on the council's performance and on delivery of council priorities. All respondents were very or fairly satisfied with the corporate peer challenges received, and would be likely to recommend it to other councils.

7. We keep our improvement offer under regular evaluation and review. This year we commissioned Shared Intelligence to undertake a series of in-depth interviews with leaders and chief executives from 18 councils that benefitted from a corporate peer challenge and/or in-depth sector-led improvement support. This investigation found four key areas of impact, including strengthening managerial and political leadership, challenging councils to grasp particular issues, reinforcing messages through the challenge process, and boosting council confidence.
8. We also conducted a survey of councils which received a corporate peer challenge between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018 to reflect on impact a year after the challenges took place. 92 per cent said it had a positive impact on culture and behaviours within their council, 90 per cent on delivery of council priorities, and 89 per cent on external reputation of the council.

Leadership

9. The LGA's **Highlighting Leadership offer** provides a range of programmes, events and resources aimed at supporting and developing councillors at all levels and helping them progress through the various stages of their political careers. It has been another excellent year for bookings with 842 councillors participating in our programmes (including Wales), and we have worked to increase the diversity of councillors attending our programmes.
10. Highlights from our ongoing evaluation of the leadership programmes demonstrates their value. 100 per cent of responding participants in our flagship Leadership Academy programmes and 97 per cent in Leadership Essentials programmes said they felt more confident in their ability to carry out their role having participated in the course.
11. During the year we have seen an increase in the take up locally of the '**Be a Councillor**' campaign. We have produced a toolkit to support councils in their local bespoke programmes and have developed partnerships with Parliamentary outreach and organisations with a focus on under-represented groups such as women and young people.
12. We have recruited 62 participants to take part in the **Next Generation** programme which is aimed at talented councillors across the political parties. Delegates attend residential modules, meet councillors from across the country, and learn and develop as a cohort of peers and critical friends.
13. **The National Graduate Development Programme** (ngdp) has continued to grow in popularity and success, with more councils taking part in the scheme and an increase in application numbers. We placed 123 graduates with councils this year, and we have introduced more options for graduate interchanges/secondments between councils for 2018/19.
14. During the year we worked with SOLACE to strengthen our offer to support the development of **managerial leadership capacity** in the sector, supporting a total of 94

officers in a variety of programmes. This includes a leadership programme for existing Chief Executives to equip them for the future.

15. Our apprenticeships programme has helped councils meet their public sector apprenticeship targets through a range of activity including regional workshops and network events, best practice guidance, and running a Knowledge Hub group with over 250 active members. We have also worked with the Education and Skills Funding Agency to provide targeted support where necessary.
16. We have continued to provide a range of support to help councils develop flexible and productive workforces. We have supported 77 councils to help them transform their workplaces and modernise the way they are managed.

Efficiency and productivity

17. During the year we have helped over 300 councils to transform their services. We were excited to launch the Transformation and Innovation Exchange at the LGA annual conference, which includes an online self-assessment tool, resources and narrative as a comprehensive package to support councils in making efficiencies.
18. We have continued to encourage councils to consider the potential benefits of **shared service** arrangements and run the shared services 'matchmaking' service to provide assistance to councils who wish to share services and/or management teams with other councils. The 2019 refresh of the Shared Service Map evidenced shows that there are now 626 individual shared service arrangements across the country resulting in £1.34 billion of efficiency savings which further evidences the local government sector's role at the forefront of collaborative working, working with restricted budgets while still making efficiency savings.
19. Local Government's interest in **commercialisation and income generation** has continued to grow throughout 2018/19 and we have developed a range of support designed to help councils pursue appropriate and well considered commercial opportunities. This year we have delivered a range of support and events, as well as sessions at the LGA conference on 'Profit with a purpose', focused on how commercial activities are driving social value and having a successful impact on local jobs, skills and growth. We have also delivered commercial skills training to officers in partnership with the Institute of Directors, and masterclasses for elected members. **Commercial experts** were commissioned to work with five councils this year through our programme, contributing towards an estimated £9.7 million additional income.
20. Our **productivity experts programme** is an opportunity for councils to access expertise to realise ambitious efficiency savings and income generation. During 2018/19 productivity experts worked with 42 councils to deliver £42.6 million efficiency savings and/or income generation. The experts provided support around a wide range of areas, including economic growth, procurement, asset management and specific service efficiency reviews. We have also collaborated with the **Behavioural Insights Team** and the **Design Council** among others to support 22 councils on a range of innovative projects to tackle key council concerns, including public health.

21. Our new **housing advisers programme** has gone from strength to strength. Flexible and locally-led, the new programme provides an independent expert for up to 20 days, providing bespoke support to a local authority project to deliver homes, reduce homelessness, or generate savings or revenues. We supported 60 councils over the year with 45 projects, and 100 per cent of councils said the support had a positive impact on the main outcome they hoped to achieve.
22. We have partnered with **other organisations** to provide practical support. Our collaboration with Local Partnerships has helped councils identify over £36 million of savings. We have continued to support the One Public Estate programme, which has now delivered £183 million in capital receipts, cut running costs by £26 million, created 5,938 jobs and released land for 3,463 homes.

Accountability, transparency and sharing good practice

23. We have maintained our coverage of 100 per cent of councils registered with **LG Inform**, which had over 250,000 page views from 44,000 unique visitors over the year. Authority users can view data or pre-written reports, and create their own reports, using the most up to date published information. We added 800 new metrics to LGA Inform this year, and published reports on topics including personal wellbeing, the gender pay gap and indices of multiple deprivation.
24. We have developed our database for capturing and sharing innovative practice, which now contains over 1,000 examples.
25. We made a successful bid for Cabinet Office funding under the **National Cyber Security Programme**, securing £1.5 million for 2018/19. We have used this funding to carry out a cyber security stocktake of all 353 English councils, capturing current arrangements including risks and good practice, and used this to shape a programme of support for the sector. We have awarded over £1 million of grants to 116 councils at greatest risk and to address issues that can be quickly resolved.

Oversight of LGA Improvement activity

26. Members have agreed that it is important for the Improvement and Innovation Board to retain an “overarching” perspective on the improvement activity currently undertaken across LGA Boards and have received regular reports from all Boards and had the opportunity, among others, to provide strategic input to the development of the integrated Care and Health Improvement Programme, our children’s services improvement work and our offer of support on Devolution.