

29 October 2019

Priorities and work programme

Purpose of report

For discussion and direction.

Summary

This report invites members to agree the Board priorities for 2019/20, to note the implementation of the improvement programme last year and progress to date in delivering the improvement programme for 2019/20 and to offer thoughts about the potential shape of the improvement programme for 2020/21.

Recommendations

Improvement and Innovation Board members are asked to:

1. Agree the Board priorities for 2019/20 and confirm member leads ;
2. Comment on the potential shape of the improvement programme for 2020/21.

Action

As directed by members.

Contact officer: Dennis Skinner
Head of Improvement

Matthew Hamilton
Head of Improvement Co-ordination
and Strategy

Phone no: 0207 664 3017

0207 664 3049

Email: Dennis.skinner@local.gov.uk

Matthew.hamilton@local.gov.uk

Priorities and work programme

Background

1. All LGA Boards are asked to consider their priorities for the coming year at the first Board meeting of the new cycle. For the Improvement and Innovation Board (IIB) the work programme is in effect the improvement programme set out in the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). This report also updates members on delivery of the improvement programme and invites members' views on the shape of the programme for 2020/21, to inform discussions with MHCLG.
2. The LGA's Boards seek to lead the agenda for local government on the key challenges and issues within their remit, and support the overall objectives of the organisation, as set out in the LGA's Business Plan.
3. The IIB leads the Supporting Councils theme of the LGAs business plan; providing a strategic framework within which other LGA Boards provide improvement support in relation to the other Business Plan priorities and contributes to the cross-organisational work on Britain's exit from the EU, primarily through its work on Procurement. The Supporting Councils theme sets out an effective programme of support developed in line with the overall approach to sector led improvement and consistent with the MoU with MHCLG.
4. The *programme* of sector led improvement support comprises a number of **core building blocks**, based on what we have learnt works for improvement. They are:
 - 4.1. Peer challenge;
 - 4.2. Leadership development programmes;
 - 4.3. Efficiency and productivity support;
 - 4.4. Tools to share comparative performance data; and
 - 4.5. Sharing good and innovative practice.
5. The Government (MHCLG) supports this approach to sector led improvement and provides grant funding set out in a detailed MoU agreed between the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA)/LGA and MHCLG. 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 MHCLG grant funding. The MoU agreed with MHCLG is for one year only and amounts to £19.2 million in 2019/20. The main improvement grant has reduced by over 60 per cent in real terms since 2010/11. MHCLG received a 4.45 per cent cash terms increase in its budget in 2020/21 and our negotiations with MHCLG will set out the cost pressures facing the existing SLI offer and MoU
6. The IIB oversees delivery of a large part of the work of the LGA funded by the MHCLG grant. The MoU sets out what the funding can and cannot be used for and includes a detailed list of outcomes and outputs. The IDeA Board has overall formal responsibility for all the work funded by the MHCLG grant. A link to the Memorandum of Understanding for 2019/20 can be found [here](#)

Board priorities

7. Historically the Board has organised its work around the following core areas, each of which has been led by lead members. These have been slightly updated to reflect changing priorities following discussions with lead members.

- 7.1. **Improvement (including peer challenge) and Innovation: Cllr Peter Fleming**

This is the theme under which the vast majority of our peer support and peer challenge work is covered. We are due to deliver 110 peer challenges, including 70 corporate peer challenges, this financial year and put in place peer based support in over 150 councils. We have developed a tiered approach to the peer based model, recognising that whilst most support offers will be universal, some councils will sometimes face more significant challenges and will require more bespoke support. Our work to support innovation in councils includes work with the Design Council to explore design techniques to transform services and manage demand and also with the Behavioural Insights Unit, plus the Innovation Zone at the LGA Annual Conference.

- 7.2. **Leadership: Cllr Judi Billing**

The LGA's political leadership programmes provide direct support to improve the skills of councillors and senior managers across local government. The programme includes our Leadership Academy and Leadership Essentials programmes which provide development opportunities for approx 800 councillors. Also included in this area are our Next Generation and "Be a Councillor" programmes, plus the national graduate development programme (ngdp). In the light of feedback from the sector, the programme also includes support for managerial leadership development, delivered in partnership with SOLACE.

- 7.3. **Efficiency and productivity: Cllr Neil Prior**

Our efficiency and productivity programme provides a range of support to help councils achieve this which focuses on three broad areas, It supports the transformation of services either to make them more efficient and less wasteful The programme also focuses on smarter sourcing, commissioning and buying goods, works and services that contribute to local outcomes more efficiently and effectively managing the resulting contracts to optimise value from them. Finally there is a focus on generating income, including a greater proportion of funding locally, such as by commercialising the authority's existing skills, assets or commodities or investing to grow the local economy to generate wealth for the area. This portfolio will also promote open data standards and the on-going development of LG Inform and the Transformation and Innovation Exchange (TIEX), our on-line comparative data, benchmarking services helping councils to continuously improve.

- 7.4. **Sharing best practice and Climate change: Cllr Liz Green**

This work will support the ongoing development of our climate change improvement offer to councils which is set out in more detail in the separate climate change paper. The portfolio will also consider best practice and how best to share this best practice in all SLI deliverables

8. The IIB and lead members will also consider the development and implementation of a communications plan in relation to SLI as a priority this year and will have the opportunity to feed into the external review of SLI commissioned by the LGA (which is scheduled to take place from January-May) and the development of the LGA response to it in the summer. The IIB will also take forward a campaign around the costs and effectiveness of public notices in local newspapers.
9. Wider research issues will align with the priorities the specific issue relates to with cross cutting issues being considered by lead members and the improvement and Innovation Board as appropriate
10. The Board is invited to re-affirm these priorities and the member leads outlined above. It would also be helpful for Board members to express a preference around their involvement in these themes. This will allow us to target board members to take part in theme working groups that might occur.
11. **Board members** have a valuable contribution to make to this work:
 - 11.1. Providing oversight of the improvement programme as a whole;
 - 11.2. Advising on the shape of the offer, ensuring that it addresses the changing needs of councils;
 - 11.3. Providing feedback on the effectiveness of the offer, either as a result of take up in their own council or by neighbouring councils; and
 - 11.4. Promoting visibility and take up of the offer within their areas. Members can keep up to date with developments by signing up to the Board bulletin here: <http://local.gov.uk/ebulletins>.
 - 11.5. Communicating and advocating the SLI approach
12. **Member Peer Conference:** The sector led approach to improvement is effective because it is a peer-based model. Peers contribute challenge, advice and support based on the practical knowledge and experience gained by working in the sector and dealing with the challenges it faces. Member and officer peers are integral to its success .
13. On 13 November the LGA is hosting an annual Conference for Member Peers in Milton Keynes. The conference will be a key occasion to thank peers for the contribution they make to the success of sector led improvement and provide an important opportunity to engage peers on the key issues facing the sector, helping to inform the LGA's improvement work going forward.

Improvement programme -

14. The MoU provides for regular reporting about the progress of delivering the improvement programme and its impact. The annual report for 2018/19, provided as part of the fourth quarter monitoring meeting in August 2019, can be accessed here <https://local.gov.uk/sector-led-improvement-201819> .Overall (48 of 50 targets) set in the

MoU were either met or exceeded, with a further one (national workforce strategy) launched in April 2019 following mutual agreement.

15. The report sets out a positive assessment of the delivery and effectiveness of the support programme:
 - 15.1 145 peer challenges delivered to a wide range of local authorities, a 20 per cent increase from last year. Seventy-one of those councils having a Corporate/Finance Peer Challenge.
 - 15.2 842 councillors developed through participation in our various leadership programmes.
 - 15.3 Over £42.6 million saved by helping councils through the deployment of our productivity experts in 42 councils over four years.
 - 15.4 14 councils supported through the 'Design in public sector' programme to provide them with design skills to address public health challenges.
 - 15.5 120 graduates recruited and trained for the sector through our National Graduate Development Programme (ngdp).
 - 15.6 60 councils supported on 42 specific housing projects
16. A detailed performance report for the first six months to end September is being prepared at the time of report writing and will be submitted to Lead Members, the IDeA Board and circulated to Board members as soon as it is available. However progress is good with 58 peer challenges having been delivered in the first half of the year and over 980 councillors already signed up to our leadership programmes.

Improvement programme - priorities for 20/21 onwards

17. Discussions with MHCLG will soon begin about the shape of the improvement programme for the remainder of 19/20 and for 20/21. It is important that the LGA is able to enter these discussions with a clear understanding of the sector's support needs and the LGA has embarked on a process of engaging the sector to capture what the improvement priorities should be in future years. Whilst much of councils improvement needs will be reflected in the current Memorandum of Understanding, it is important to identify any new and emerging priorities for councils as part of the sector led process of improvement.
18. To date this has included discussions that the LGA's Principal Advisors and National/Regional Member Peers have with members and senior officers on a regular basis alongside engagement through our productivity, research and leadership activity. We are also currently surveying councils about priorities. The views of members of the Improvement and Innovation Board are an important part of this process and we will also invite feedback and contributions from member peers at the forthcoming Member Peer Conference in November.

19. Feedback so far from the sector 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.
20. In terms of developing the programme for 2020/21 it has been suggested that the following additional areas should be included:
 - 20.1 Climate change, including strengthening communications, best/good practice, leadership support, and practical/strategic advice on taking immediate action (this is set out in more detail in the climate change paper).
 - 20.2 The use of digital tools/solutions and development of innovative artificial intelligence programmes to support a productive workforce.
 - 20.3 Inclusive Leadership tools resources to help councils, councillors and officers create diverse and inclusive cultures and encourage greater civility in public life.
 - 20.4 Building and maintaining local resilience.
21. We would welcome members' contributions on these issues and further suggestions to help develop and shape the improvement programme for 2020/21.
22. In terms of next steps we will continue to work with the sector to develop a clear sense of improvement priorities for 2020/21 and expect to engage MHCLG later this year with a view to agreeing grant funding for 2020/21 as soon as possible.
23. Progress reports will be brought to the Board and IDeA Board in January.

Implications for Wales

24. MHCLG grant is for England only. In Wales improvement work is provided directly by the WLGA. However some of the priorities (such as communication and public notices) will relate to Wales.

Financial Implications

25. There may be additional financial implications arising as a result of this report.

Next steps

26. Officers will progress the work in the light of members' guidance.