

## **Improvement and Innovation Board – report from Cllr David Simmonds CBE (Chairman)**

### **Improvement**

1. Over the course of November and December 2015, I visited and met representatives from a number of councils to discuss their improvement plans, including Birmingham City Council, Somerset County Council, Northamptonshire County Council, and Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council. I used these conversations to share best practice on a range of issues and highlight the different elements of the LGA's sector-led improvement offer that might be particularly helpful for each council going forward.
2. On 10 November 2015, I participated in a panel discussion at LG Communications' Public Sector Communications Academy 2015. The Academy looks to bring central and local government together to develop new communications skills, embrace disruptive technology and change the culture of public service professionals. The session that I took part in focussed on the challenges facing the sector and the role professional communications can play in meeting them.
3. I briefed the press on a range of improvement-related issues over the course of November and December 2015, as well as taking a leading role in presenting the LGA's response to the Local Government Finance Settlement in the days following 17 December.
4. Our sector-led improvement offer remains popular with councils. In 2015/16, up to and including the second quarter, the LGA has worked with: 38 councils on change of control/leader support, 27 councils on bespoke mentoring support, 16 councils on top team development work, 17 councils with follow up work to peer challenges, 101 councils on direct improvement support and 36 councils on communications improvement support. In the same timeframe, 100 peer challenges had been delivered, confirmed, or were in discussion, including corporate, finance, fire, children and adults challenge. There were also three corporate peer challenge follow up visits and we delivered eight peer development/briefing events, with both further visits and briefings planned.
5. On 19 November 2015, we published our [Making Safeguarding Personal: 2014-15 evaluation report](#). This evaluation aims to find out the impact of using a Making Safeguarding Personal (MSP) approach on: outcomes for people using safeguarding services; ways of working and professional culture in safeguarding; partnership working and culture change. It also looks at what further support would be needed to ensure consistent implementation and makes some recommendations for future work.

### **Innovation**

6. We worked with a number of sector representative bodies to produce, in December 2015, [a set of papers](#) that outline the sector's position and priorities for digital including: improving online transactional services; transforming local public services; developing the necessary leadership skills to understand and apply digital approaches; coordinating programme leadership and support. Taken together the four papers set out a high-level case for investing in a coordinated and comprehensive programme of support. This will enable local government to maximise the customer benefits and cost savings that can be generated from exploiting the potential of modern digital tools, technologies and approaches in local public services.

## Transparency

7. We published two reports for those authorities subscribing through LG Inform. The first, [available here](#), pulls together data from the Local Government Workforce and Earnings surveys and presents it at local authority level. It displays information on sickness absence, labour turnover, vacancy rate, the demographics of the highest earners, annual pay, age profile and ethnic origin. The second, [available here](#), provides housing related data at ward level or below, including density, tenure, dwelling type, over/under occupation and energy consumption, helping build a picture of a local authority's housing related pressures, which with further local information helps identify local issues, priorities and areas for further investigation.
8. At the end of November 2015, we launched the latest iteration of the popular 'Spidergram' analysis to show councils how they compare with others on a range of financial indicators. For the first time, the data and format were released on LG Inform (copy and paste this link to your web browser to access this directly [http://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/view/lga-research/financial-diagnostic-report-1?mod-area=E10000009&mod-group=AllCountiesInCountry\\_England&modify-report=Apply](http://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/view/lga-research/financial-diagnostic-report-1?mod-area=E10000009&mod-group=AllCountiesInCountry_England&modify-report=Apply)), which will enable member councils to construct their own comparator groups. Due to the sensitive nature of the Spidergrams, they are only currently available to registered users, ie councils.

## Leadership

9. I led two Leadership Essentials courses for children's services on 28 – 29 October and 7 – 8 November 2015. These events provide a chance for councillors to develop leadership skills in a particular area and share experiences among colleagues dealing with similar challenges. We also held Leadership Essentials courses for adult social care (18 – 19 November), cultural services (3 – 4 November and 2 – 3 December), planning (14 – 15 November and 2 – 3 December) and health and wellbeing boards (18 – 19 November and a forthcoming event on 27 – 28 January 2016)
10. On 17 December 2016, Cllr Judi Billing, as the Lead Member for Leadership Development, spoke at the District Councils' Network's National Development Conference for officers. For their theme *Working in a Political Environment* Cllr Billing gave valuable insight linked to the LGA's Be a Councillor campaign on councillor diversity to 60 talented officers on a 12 month programme to support them as they start their local government careers.
11. It is a record-breaking year for bookings onto LGA political leadership development programmes. With 50 events already delivered we will have provided around 80 political leadership development events in total by the end of March 2016. To date, we have over 800 delegates registered to attend these events from 266 authorities and including 57 leaders. Due to demand, an additional Leadership Academy has been added to our development programme and will start in February 2016.
12. We ran two of the new one-day master classes under Highlighting Political Leadership for members on *Consultation and Engagement* and *Leading Cultural Change*. Both received positive feedback and the final master class on *Risk Management* will take place in February 2016.

**Productivity**

13. More than [100 additional councils](#) are joining the [One Public Estate programme](#), which the LGA is leading with the Cabinet Office. In addition, the Government has announced £31 million of extra funding to expand the programme to more areas. The programme enables local councils to work with other public sector organisations to share buildings and services, reduce running costs and release land for development, and is an excellent example of local government leadership and efficiency.

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