

## Note of last Improvement & Innovation Board meeting

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**Title:** Improvement & Innovation Board  
**Date:** Thursday 21 May 2020  
**Venue:** Zoom video call

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### Attendance

An attendance list is attached as **Appendix A** to this note

Item	Decisions and actions
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**1**      **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**2**      **Public notices - oral update**

David Holdstock, Director of Communications, updated members on latest developments with publishing public notices.

**Decision**

Members of the Improvement & Innovation Board noted the update.

**3**      **Summary of improvement Activity for the period April 2019 to end of March 2020**

The Chairman invited Dennis Skinner, Head of Improvement, to introduce the report.

Dennis set out the performance against the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) the LGA had with MHCLG, and other improvement activity, covering the full financial year from April 2019 to March 2020.

There followed a confidential discussion on the contents of the report.

**Decision**

Members of the Improvement & Innovation Board noted the report.

**4**      **Note of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 March 2020 were agreed.

**5**      **LGA COVID-19 Refocused Sector Support for 2020/21**

The Chairman invited Matthew Hamilton, Head of Improvement Strategy

and Co-ordination, to introduce the report.

Matthew reported that the MHCLG grant for the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) had now been secured at the same level as last year. The MoU itself was just 2 pages long this year giving the LGA much more freedom and flexibility to deliver appropriate support to councils as they attempted to address the challenges caused by Covid-19. Matthew added that there was a clause in the MoU to review the situation around COVID-19 after six months, with a possible return to focus on business as usual issues.

Matthew said that the report set out how the LGA offer to councils had changed over a short period of time to support them through COVID-19. He cited the examples of the Remote Meetings Hub which had been set up within 3 weeks of the lockdown, and a refocussing in the work of the Care and Health Improvement Programme and Children's Improvement teams.

Matthew then described proposed changes to the peer challenge offer comprising two separate strands:

1. remote 'recovery' peer panels – a short, sharp review over a 3- or 4-hour period sharing best practice on recovery.
2. bespoke remote peer support to address specific issues raised by councils.

These would be piloted in June with potential roll-out in July to October. It was hoped that more formal peer challenges would be able to resume in some form from October.

Finally, Matthew reported that Lead Members of the IIB had agreed that the Sector Led Improvement (SLI) Review should be extended by an extra month in order to capture some of the refocussed improvement work around COVID-19.

The Chairman put on record his thanks to Matthew and his team for the excellent work they had done in such a short period of time.

Following Matthew's introduction, Members raised the following points:

- Concern was expressed over the resilience of the sector in the face of COVID-19. Matthew said that the key issue as councils move into the recovery phase was finance. He said that staff numbers had stood up very well in most councils and services hadn't been adversely affected to any great extent. However, councils were going to need significantly more financial support from Government if they were to be truly resilient.
- The positive role that the Community and Voluntary sector had played during the crisis was raised and, in particular, the space that councils had given them to get on with what they do best. It was noted that this enabling role of councils should be extended into the recovery phase.
- Specific training for councils on emergency budget setting was requested. Alan Finch, Principal Adviser (Finance) said that they would investigate this as it was going to be an issue for most councils.
- Strong partnership working in two-tier council areas during the

crisis was highlighted and it was suggested that these experiences should be embedded for the future, with a possible facilitating role for the LGA.

### **Decision**

Improvement and Innovation Board members noted the report and the support that the LGA was putting in place during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **6 Highlighting Leadership offer: 2020/21 work update**

The Chairman invited Cllr Judi Billing MBE (deputy chair) and Helen Jenkins, Head of Leadership, to introduce the report.

Judi said that strong and effective leadership would be vital in enabling councils to support their communities through the COVID-19 recovery phase. She said that officers had been refocusing the LGA's leadership offer so that senior councillors and officers had access to learning resources and the ability to share their experiences with their peers. She added that e-learning resources were going to become increasingly important in delivering these programmes in the future.

Helen said that it was important for councillors to be able to tap into the positive community spirit that had been generated as a result of the Covid-19 crisis and to take this forward through the recovery phase. She highlighted the National Graduate Development Programme and the fact that officers had managed to turn the assessment process into a fully digital one in very short time.

Following the introduction, members raised the following points:

- It was stated that councillors were not immune from the issues surrounding COVID-19, such as increased domestic abuse, and that this should be recognised. Helen said that work on the code of conduct and intimidation of councillors was ongoing and she would feed these comments into it.
- Despite the obvious benefits during the lockdown, a word of caution was sounded about carrying out all meetings and training digitally in the future. It was suggested that innovation and insight could often be better gained from informal in-person meetings.

The Chairman thanked Helen and her team for working so hard to adjust the leadership offer to the new conditions in such a short period of time.

### **Decision**

Members of the Improvement and Innovation Board noted the report.

## **7 COVID-19 Local Government Supply Chain - Support to Councils**

The Chairman invited Cllr Neil Prior (Deputy chair) and Susan Attard, Head of Productivity, to introduce the report.

Susan said that the LGA was working closely with MHCLG and the Cabinet Office over supply chain issues in three specific areas:

- Identifying and raising issues on behalf of the sector

- Helping to develop Government Procurement Policy Notes and identifying any gaps
- Identifying and sharing areas of best practice with councils.

Susan then asked Tina Holland, Programme Manager Productivity, to update members on issues that had arisen since the report was written.

Tina said that procurement of PPE remained the biggest issue for councils. She said that in the absence of a coherent response from central Government, the LGA had established a sub-group of the National Advisory Group to share information on supply chains across the regions to avoid each council having to do their own thing.

Tina reported that the LGA had been working closely with Government on producing three new Procurement Policy Notes and that a new one was due out the following week. These were designed to make procurement simpler for councils.

On adult social care, Tina said that they were working closely with the LGA's Care and Health Improvement Partnership team to exchange information and intelligence about providers and were also looking at recovery planning in the providers market.

On children's services, Tina reported that the commissioning and procurement group of around 40 councils had been a great sounding board to understand key issues arising from the sector and that these were being fed directly into meetings with central government.

Tina reported that one of the main children's social care providers, Cambian, had this week written to councils asking for a five to ten per cent uplift in fees to cover additional costs arising from Covid-19. The LGA had brought councils together this week to form a more strategic response to this issue and their request was now on hold.

On construction, Tina said that most firms were now returning to work and that whilst suppliers were starting to reopen, there were some bottlenecks in the supply of materials. She added that the LGA was developing specific construction related training on this.

Following the introduction, members raised the following points:

- The COVID-19 pandemic had exacerbated the national affordable housing shortage – what was the LGA doing to help get building going again? Tina said they were continuing to talk to building firms about procurement and she wasn't anticipating any major issues as the lockdown eased.
- It was stated that some councils were providing PPE free of charge, including to privately run care homes. It was felt that councils were doing more than they needed to in this regard and that there was a danger of them becoming scapegoats in the event that things went wrong.
- Was the LGA doing any thinking around the effect on supply chains of the 'new normal' post-COVID-19? It was suggested for example that the markets for offices and short-term lets could collapse. Tina replied that the National Advisory Group steering group was meeting at the beginning of June to talk about the

recovery phase and what markets might look like longer term.

- It was suggested that a consortium could be set up to purchase PPE in the longer term.
- Concern was expressed about the capacity of some councils to carry out strategic long-term thinking as the immediate crisis abated and the country moved into a recovery phase. The innovative practice that took place during the crisis phase should not be stifled.
- It was reported that the Climate Change Working Group has begun to look at bigger picture issues such as a 'green recovery' and SWOT analysis was being carried out. Grace Abel, Productivity Adviser, added that it was vital that the climate emergency didn't take a back seat in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic and that the SWOT analysis needed to translate into tangible actions for local government.

### **Decision**

Members of the Improvement and Innovation Board noted the issues raised by councils and the support put in place by the LGA.

## **8 AOB**

In relation to climate change, Cllr Liz Green (vice chair), raised the following points:

- The Centre for Public Scrutiny were due to publish a document in June on '10 top-level questions to ask your council'
- The Climate Change Leadership Essentials event would be taking place in October. The team was also running more webinars and Liz said that more case studies from councils were always welcome.
- The carbon emissions tool would be complete by July.
- 84 responses to the council climate change survey had been received and this was being chased up again to try and get more.

Lusi Manukyan, Improvement Strategy Adviser, reported that an extensive programme of virtual events was being developed to take place around the week of the LGA Annual Conference. The Innovation Zone would be brought back as a separate event – over 70 applications had been received and these were currently being looked through. Other more condensed events were also being planned, including one on SLI looking at the results of the Shared Intelligence review.

Dennis Skinner added that it was planned to launch a major publication during the conference week on COVID-19, celebrating what councils had achieved and the wider implications for the future of local government. Dennis said that there would be at least one large set-piece event during conference week and then a range of smaller virtual events over a period of a few weeks. Webinars and video conferences had so far proved to be very popular with members.

Heather Wills, Principal Adviser, reported that she had been carrying out a peer challenge stock take alongside the SLI review. She said that the timescale for this had been put back due to work on Covid-19 but she would be pulling together this work into a report. She said that peer

challenge was a much-valued part of the LGA's SLI offer but that more could be done to capture the results and to involve member councils.

### **Appendix A -Attendance**

Position/Role	Councillor	Authority
Chairman	Cllr Peter Fleming OBE	Sevenoaks District Council
Vice-Chair	Cllr Liz Green	Kingston upon Thames Royal Borough Council
Deputy-chair	Cllr Judi Billing MBE	Hertfordshire County Council
	Cllr Neil Prior	Pembrokeshire County Council
Members	Cllr Philip Broadhead	Bournemouth Borough Council
	Cllr Carl Les	North Yorkshire County Council
	Cllr Laura Miller	Dorset Council
	Cllr Damian White	Havering London Borough Council
	Cllr Phil North	Test Valley Borough Council
	Cllr Alice Perry	Islington Council
	Cllr Joy Allen	Durham County Council
	Cllr Vince Maple	Medway Council
	Cllr Rebecca Lury	Southwark Council
	Cllr Andrew Western	Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council
	Mayor Dave Hodgson MBE	Bedford Borough Council
	Cllr Wayne Davies	Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council
	Cllr Alan Connett	Teignbridge District Council
	Cllr Mike Haines	Teignbridge District Council
	Mr Philip Sellwood CBE	Energy Saving Trust (EST)
Apologies	Sir Stephen Houghton CBE	Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council
In Attendance	Cllr Kelham Cooke	South Kenton District Council
	Cllr Rory Love OBE	East Kent District Council
	Cllr Miranda Williams	Kent County Council
	Cllr Oliver Ryan	Royal Borough of Greenwich Council
	Cllr Tom Coole	Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council
	Cllr Alex Coley	Gloucester City Council
	Cllr Alan Connett	Epsom & Ewell Council
	Cllr Mike Haines	Teignbridge District Council