

Improvement and Innovation Board: Review of the Year

Sector-led Improvement

1. This year we have seen the consolidation of the refreshed approach to sector-led improvement introduced following previous consultation with the sector, the delivery of a wide-ranging improvement offer, and the development of new offers responding to the changing demands of the sector. We have also strengthened our monitoring and reporting arrangements providing confidence to Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) - reflected in grant of **£21 million** for 2017/18, at a broadly similar level to the previous year.
2. Our approach provides different tiers of support depending on the intensity of the challenges faced locally, with our regionally based team of **Principal Advisers** acting as the focal point for discussions with councils about their improvement needs and the support we can make available. We are working 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 4-5 years. We also expect participating councils to publish the peer challenge report, to produce an action plan and to have a follow-up visit within two years.
3. We keep our offer of support under review and as part of the second full-scale evaluation of the approach have this year received specific reports arising from an independent evaluation of the **Corporate Peer Challenge** (CPC) offer and an evaluation of our leadership programmes. We also undertook a wide-ranging consultation with the sector about their support needs for 2017/18 which has shaped our Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with DCLG.
4. The results from the LGA Perceptions Survey this year again demonstrate the sector's support for the sector-led improvement approach and the value attached to the LGA's support offer. 70 per cent of respondents who were aware of sector-led improvement reported that they 'strongly agree' or 'agree' that it is the right approach in the current context. 83 per cent believe that the support and resources offered by the LGA for sector-led improvement have had a positive impact on their authority, increasing to 89 per cent of chief executives and 85 per cent of leaders.
5. We ran our fifth successful **Innovation Zone** at our Annual Conference this year involving at least 44 speakers, representing innovative work from over 50 organisations. Improvement and Innovation Board members helped compere the full programme, which commenced with an interactive community style workshop by Fun Palaces, with the final day's programme showcasing housing, road safety and other innovations from New Urban Mechanics, Boston. Hundreds of delegates visited the Zone and case studies will be uploaded to the LGA website to further share those lessons with others.

Improvement

6. 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 25 councils, bespoke peer mentoring support to 82 councils (often arising as part of the peer challenge follow up action), top team development work with 14 councils, service-based support to 47 councils and working with CfPS, advice and support to 46 councils to help develop scrutiny.

7. During 2016/17 more than 130 **peer challenges** have been delivered covering a range of different areas including corporate, finance, fire, children's and adults. 750 peer challenges have been delivered since 2011, meaning that councils have contributed 15,000 days of senior councillor and officer time, representing a considerable investment. We have also delivered 17 peer development or briefing events during the year as we seek to widen and refresh our pool of member and officer peers.
8. The CPC programme has involved engagement with 62 councils in 2016/17 through a full corporate peer challenge, finance peer review, or a peer-led follow up visit. An independent evaluation of the programme ('**Rising to the Challenge**') demonstrates that the CPC remains a highly effective tool, has a positive impact for participating councils and the sector as a whole, and provides value for money.
9. Following lobbying by the LGA, the Secretary of State prescribed **Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited (PSAA)**, a company owned by the Improvement and Development Agency, to be the sector-led 'appointing person' for auditors when the current contracts end in March 2018. Almost all relevant bodies opted in to the PSAA national scheme. Contracts have now been let with six audit firms and audit fees will reduce by at least a further 18 per cent in 2018/19 at the start of the new contracts. This is a remarkable achievement and demonstrates the benefits of a co-ordinated national approach, envisaged and promoted by the LGA and delivered by PSAA.

Productivity

10. We have continued to encourage councils to consider the potential benefits of **shared service** arrangements and during the year launched a shared services 'matchmaking' service to provide assistance to councils who wish to share services and/or management teams with other councils. The 2016-17 refresh of the shared services map identified 296 shared service arrangements contributing to £500 million of efficiency savings.
11. Local Government's interest in commercialisation and income generation has continued to grow. We launched the **LGA Commercial Skills Procurement Solution (CSPS)** to provide councils with a place to procure commercial skills at a competitive rate and in partnership with the Institute of Directors (IOD) we also launched a new **Commercial Skills** training offer for senior officers designed to equip officers with additional knowledge, expertise and commercial skills.
12. **Productivity experts** worked with 34 councils to deliver £26.5 million efficiency savings, whilst an external evaluation of the Productivity Experts programme found that it had contributed to efficiency savings/income generation of approximately £133 million. We have collaborated with the **Behavioural Insights Team** to support five councils and with the **Design Council** to support ten councils in services that are 'different by design'. Forty-two funded digital programmes have been progressed with councils and funding for a further 23 channel shift themed projects has been awarded, all contributing to savings for councils and adding to our fund of good practice case studies.
13. In accordance with the National **Procurement** strategy for local government we have continued to develop new category strategies in high spend areas which councils can use to procure more effectively. The procurement frameworks produced this year are estimated to have helped councils save in excess of £13.2 million.

Leadership

14. 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 strong year for bookings with 649 councillors participating in our programmes.
15. Highlights from our evaluation of the leadership programmes demonstrated that 95 per cent of respondents said their objectives had been achieved and 96 per cent said they felt more confident in their role as a councillor having participated in our leadership programmes.
16. During the year we have refreshed, updated and promoted the **Be a Councillor** campaign leading to increased take up locally, particularly this year saw the first event focused specifically on engaging more women in politics in partnership with Isle of Wight council.
17. We have reviewed and refreshed our **E-learning offer** to ensure it continues to reflect the challenges councillors are facing locally. We now have over 8,000 registered members and the number of training options available continues to grow.
18. **The National Graduate Development Programme (NGDP)** has continued to grow, with more councils and an increase in application numbers. We placed 94 graduates this year and will explore secondment opportunities across different sectors, for example with the Civil Service fast track scheme.

Transparency and data

19. We have maintained our coverage of 100 per cent of councils registered with **LG Inform**. With over 4,800 signed up users, an increase of nearly 20 per cent in the last year. New developments to help users were undertaken, a total of 1,400 new metrics were added to the database and ready-made reports were created for users, which have been downloaded between 600 and 1600 times each so far.
20. During the year we ran 11 face to face training events with a total of 275 delegates and 10 on-line training events with 95 attendees and 107 organisations represented at these sessions.
21. The **LG Inform local benchmarking club**, which allows councils to compare data with other councils that is either not collected elsewhere or is collected with a time lag, continues to be successful with 120 authorities regularly submitting data.
22. A comprehensive data and digital programme of support was delivered, including a **training day for councillors on digital and data leadership** (with expert partners) to help their understanding of what constitutes good data management/use and digital opportunities for their organisations in their leadership role.
23. Eight authorities were given bespoke expert advice or practical support to make better use of data under our **data expert programme**,

20 July 2017

24. A range of resources were viewed by nearly 900 individuals including **a report and case studies on the better use of data** called '[Wise Council](#)' (published in partnership with Nesta) and a suite of **three eLearning modules** (developed in partnership with the Open Data Institute) on making an impact with data. Practical support in the form of **events about data** was supplied to 530 staff from 176 organisations since April 2016.

Oversight of LGA Improvement activity

25. 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, amongst others, to provide strategic input to the development of the integrated Care and Health Improvement Programme for 2017/18; our children’s services improvement work and our offer of support on Devolution.