

Improvement & Innovation Board – report from Cllr Paul Bettison OBE (Chairman)

Improvement

1. This year, with input from the board, the LGA is due to deliver 110 peer challenges and put in place peer based support in over 150 councils. Peer challenges have a positive impact for participating councils, including providing reassurance, improving external reputation, prompting behaviour change, informing organisational change and supporting transformation and financial sustainability. The LGA has developed a tiered approach to the peer based mode, recognising that whilst most support offers will be universal some councils will sometimes face more significant challenges and will require more bespoke support. All authorities are eligible to receive a Corporate Peer Challenge, at no cost, every four/five years – if your council has not had one recently please contact your Principal Adviser for further details.
2. The LGA hosted an annual conference for Member Peers at Manchester Town Hall in September. I was pleased to welcome approximately 100 member peers who attended the event. The conference was a key occasion to thank peers for the contribution they make to the success of sector led improvement, and provided an important opportunity to engage peers on the key issues facing the sector, helping to inform the LGA's improvement work going forward. Feedback from peers has been very positive.
3. The LGA has worked hard along with Public Sector Audit Appointments, which the LGA established, to put in place a successful national auditor procurement scheme. Almost all councils decided to 'opt in' to this scheme and all these councils will see their audit costs fall by at least 18 per cent, with the quality of audits being maintained, when the current contracts come to an end in March 2018. Across the country we are likely to see significant savings, on top of the 55 per cent reduction since 2011/12 following the decision by DCLG to close the Audit Commission. For example, annually, a typical:
 - 3.1. County could save around £20,000 – with fees around £150,000 lower than in 2011/12.
 - 3.2. District could save around £9,000 – with fees around £70,000 lower than in 2011/12.
 - 3.3. London borough could save around £30,000 – with fees around £230,000 lower than in 2011/12.
 - 3.4. Metropolitan council could save around £25,000 – with fees around £190,000 lower than in 2011/12.
 - 3.5. Unitary authority could save around £22,000 – with fees around £170,000 lower than in 2011/12.

Leadership

4. Our political leadership programmes provide direct support to improve the skills of councillors and senior managers across local government. Our offer includes our Leadership Academy and Leadership Essential programmes that provide development opportunities for over 700 councillors. It also includes our Next Generation, Be a

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Councillor, and national graduate development programmes. The full programme of events can be found [here](#). Member feedback on the programmes has been very positive:

"I have learnt about new and different ways of working that have helped me in difficult circumstances as well as given me a new depth of experience that has improved the way I lead." (Leader, Unitary Authority on the Leaders Programme)

"Very practical throughout and inspiring - lots of tips to take back and put in place." (Cabinet Member, London Borough on Leadership Essentials)

5. On Thursday 12 October, as part of the "Be a Councillor" Programme, the LGA and the Parliamentary Outreach Team will be jointly hosting an event for women who want to find out more about politics with the view to standing as a councillor. Women are underrepresented in politics at all levels in the UK. This workshop, during European Local Democracy Week, gives delegates the chance to hear from women who are active in politics and passionate about influencing change and making a difference in their local communities.
6. The impact of our political leadership development programmes is demonstrated through our [evaluation](#), whereby 96 per cent of respondents said they felt more confident in their role as a councillor having taken part in our programmes.

Efficiency and productivity

7. Our efficiency and productivity programme provides a range of support to help councils in these areas ranging from the creation of procurement frameworks through to the use of productivity experts which provide support such as renegotiating contracts with suppliers. This year, we have strengthened our offers around commercialism including access to a newly developed course jointly provided with the Institute of Directors. We have also recruited a number of expert financial advisers that councils can make use of, free of charge, to support them on a range of financial issues, including technical support to the medium term financial planning process.

Accountability, transparency and sharing good practice

8. LG Inform provides easy access to up-to-date published data about your local area and the performance of your council and fire and rescue service. Over the summer, we built in various [new practical features](#) and reached the landmark 1,000,000 page views. Our new [fly-tipping report](#) exemplifies what LG Inform can offer, and has been viewed almost 2,000 views since its launch.
9. The latest, September results of our [triannual polling of resident satisfaction](#) show once again a strong level of satisfaction with one's local area as a place to live (81 per cent of respondents agreed). Again, similar to the last three years, 66 per cent of respondents were satisfied with the way their local council runs things, and 60 per cent said they trusted their council 'a great deal' or 'fair amount' (the polling average is 61 per cent). We've also launched [Understanding the views of residents: an introduction to surveys and consultation](#), particularly for communications officers.

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Innovation

10. We have launched our [behavioural insights webpage](#) to provide councils with information on what behavioural insights is and how it can be used practically in councils' work. We are also encouraging councils to apply for the next phase of our behavioural insights [funding programme](#), applications for which close on 10 November 2017.

Contact officer: Dennis Skinner
Position: Head of Improvement
Phone no: 020 7664 3017
E-mail: dennis.skinner@local.gov.uk