

Improvement and Innovation Board - End of Year Report

Sector-led Improvement

1. This year we have seen the successful delivery of a wide-ranging improvement offer. All councils took up one or more of our offers; record numbers of members were trained through our leadership programmes and record numbers of graduates were attracted to the sector through our national graduate development programme. New offers have been introduced reflecting the changing needs of the sector (eg the Housing Advisers programme) and we have helped the sector respond to in-year developments such as Carillion and Grenfell.
2. In addition the results from the latest LGA perceptions survey demonstrate that our support has impact and that support for this sector-led approach to improvement continues to grow. 96 per cent of council leaders and 95 per cent of council chief executives said support from the LGA had a positive impact on their authority. Moreover there was an eight percentage point increase, across all respondents, in the proportion saying that sector-led improvement is the right approach and a 19 percentage point increase since 2012.
3. Our approach to improvement, developed in collaboration with the sector, provides different tiers of support depending on the intensity of the challenges faced locally. Our regionally based team of **Principal Advisers** act as the focal point for discussions with councils about their improvement needs and the help we can make available. We work 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.
4. We keep our offer of support under review and as part of the second full-scale **evaluation** of the approach have 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 2018/19 which has shaped our Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with MHCLG.
5. We ran our sixth successful **Innovation Zone** at our Annual Conference this year involving at least 46 speakers, representing innovative work from 40 organisations. Improvement and Innovation Board members helped compere the Zone programme, which commenced with an engaging session from Southend-on-Sea Borough Council and their robot Pepper. The final day's programme showcased how Thurrock Council and others are addressing female genital mutilation and how councils are working with Nesta to explore the future of drones, based on public needs and ambitions. 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 77 councils (often arising as part of the peer challenge follow up action), top team development work with 16 councils, service-based support to 45 councils and working with CfPS, advice and support to 52 councils to help develop scrutiny.

7. During 2017/18 115 **peer challenges** have been delivered covering a range of different areas including corporate, finance, fire, children's and adults. 865 peer challenges have been delivered since 2011, meaning that councils have contributed over 17,000 days of senior councillor and officer time, representing a considerable investment by the sector in its own improvement. We have also delivered 10 peer development or briefing events during the year as we seek to widen and refresh our pool of member and officer peers. Of the peers deployed during 2017/18 approximately a third were doing a Corporate Peer Challenge for the first time.
8. The CPC programme has involved engagement with 64 councils in 2017/18 through a full corporate peer challenge, finance peer review, or a peer-led follow up visit. We are continuing to implement recommendations from the independent evaluation of the programme ('**Rising to the Challenge**') which demonstrated 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. This is reinforced by results from our own impact survey of authorities receiving a peer challenge in 16/17. 94 per cent of respondents said the corporate peer challenge (including any further improvement support it triggered) had had a positive impact both on their council's performance and on the delivery of its priorities.
9. **Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited (PSAA)**, a company owned by the Improvement and Development Agency, successfully put in place new audit contracts to replace those which ended in March 2018. PSAA secured a 23 per cent reduction in audit fees for all councils opting in to the national scheme. 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 run the shared services 'matchmaking' service to provide assistance to councils who wish to share services and/or management teams with other councils. The 2017/18 refresh of the Shared Service Map evidenced £805m of cumulative efficiency savings from 550 shared service arrangements, this further evidences the local government sector at the forefront of collaborative working, working with restricted budgets whilst still making efficiency savings.
11. Local Government's interest in **commercialisation and income generation** has continued to grow throughout 2017/18 and we have developed a range of support designed to help councils pursue appropriate and well considered commercial opportunities. This has included updated guidance, an interactive map of council commercial good practice, delivery of the first four cohorts of the LGA/loD commercial skills training for officers, and the design and delivery of two commercial skills masterclasses for elected councillors. **Commercial experts** were commissioned through the LGA's Commercial Experts programme to work with 5 councils this year, contributing towards £9.3 million additional income for these councils.

12. Our **productivity experts programme** is an opportunity for councils to access expertise they need to realise ambitious efficiency savings and income generation. During 2017/18 productivity experts worked with 25 councils to deliver £39.9m efficiency savings and/or income generation. The experts provided support around a wide range of areas, including economic growth, procurement, asset management and specific service efficiency reviews. We have also collaborated with the **Behavioural Insights Team** to support ten councils and with the **Design Council** to support twenty councils in services that are 'different by design'.
13. We have also continued to provide support to councils on **procurement**. We published refreshed category strategies in high spend areas such as Energy; ICT; and Construction and worked with the sector to refresh the National Procurement strategy. During the year we also supported councils in dealing with the impact of the collapse of **Carillion** and initiated a high level contingency planning exercise in relation to other key suppliers to local government.

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 record year for bookings with 844 councillors participating in our programmes (including Wales).
15. Highlights from our on-going evaluation of the leadership programmes demonstrates their value. 99 per cent of responding participants in our Leadership Essentials programmes and Leadership Academy programmes said they felt more confident in their ability to carry out their role, having participated in the course.
16. During the year we have seen an increase in the take up locally of the '**Be a Councillor**' campaign. We have produced a toolkit to support councils in their local bespoke programmes and have developed partnerships with Parliamentary outreach and organisations with a focus on under-represented groups such as women and young people.
17. We have reviewed and refreshed our **E-learning offer** to ensure it continues to reflect the challenges councillors are facing locally. In the last year new modules have been introduced on data protection, anti-bribery and fraud prevention, stress management, dealing with residents with difficult issues and an introduction to Housing. We now have over 8,250 registered members and the number of training options available continues to grow.
18. **The National Graduate Development Programme** (ngdp) has continued to grow in popularity and success, with more councils taking part in the scheme and an increase in application numbers. We placed 130 graduates with councils this year – a record for this programme.
19. During the year we worked with SOLACE to strengthen our offer to support the development of **managerial leadership capacity** in the sector. A range of programmes have been developed appropriate to different career stages. Take up has been positive and feedback demonstrates that delegates have been able to progress their careers as a result – some to CEX level.

Transparency and data

20. We have maintained our coverage of 100 per cent of councils registered with **LG Inform**, which now has 5,592 registered users (an increase of 16 per cent in the past 12 months). Authority users can view data or pre-written reports, and create their own reports, using the most up to date published information. Interim results from our evaluation of LG Inform reveal that 83 per cent of those familiar with LG Inform found it useful.
21. During the year we added an additional 2,132 metrics (including 953 VFM metrics) to the database: which now contains 6,126 metrics in total. And we organised 10 face to face training events and 50 on-line training events with 345 delegates from 122 organisations attending.
22. LG Inform is available to the public. In total there were 50,000 visits over the course of the year.
23. During the year we worked with Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA) to develop **LG Inform Value for Money (VfM)** a replacement for PSAA's existing VfM Profiles. The new tool was successfully launched in November. The Value for Money (VfM) profiles bring together data about the costs, performance and activity of local councils and fire and rescue authorities. They have been designed to help auditors, people who work for councils and fire and rescue authorities and the public understand the costs of delivering local services, and to get an overview of comparative spend and performance over time and relative to others.
24. We have delivered a comprehensive programme of support around **better use of data and digital** transformation. We have commissioned the development of an online data maturity self-assessment tool to help councils explore how they might improve their use of data; initiated the development an online resource bringing together resources to help councils use information intelligently; published case studies from the Data Experts programme and supported 15 councils as part of the Digital Transformation programme and 21 councils as part of the Digital Channel Shift programme including publication of case studies.
25. We have continued to support the delivery of the National **Cyber** Security Strategy and host the Local Government Cyber Security Stakeholder Group established to widen digital and cyber resilience awareness across local authorities and highlight good practice and advice. We made a successful bid to the Cabinet Office for funding for a national Cyber Security programme for 2018/19 – this will be used to map out existing cyber security arrangements in all English councils and provide support to those that need it most.

Oversight of LGA Improvement activity

26. 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, our children's services improvement work and our offer of support on Devolution.