

## **LGA Refocused COVID-19 Sector Support**

### **Purpose of report**

For discussion.

### **Summary**

The majority of the LGA's operation is now focused on supporting local government and communities to address COVID-19 and its consequences. This report summarises the current refocused support offer which continues to evolve. The LGA will continue to review its support offer to ensure it reflects what councils need as they start to focus on recovery.

### **Recommendation/s**

That members note the report and the support that the LGA is putting in place during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Action**

Officers to continue shaping the provision of support to councils subject to Board's comments.

**Contact officer:** Matthew Hamilton  
**Position:** Head of Improvement Strategy and Coordination  
**Phone no:** 0207 7664 3049  
**Email:** matthew.hamilton@local.gov.uk

## **LGA Refocused COVID-19 Sector Support**

### **Background**

1. The LGA has rapidly focused its support to councils to ensure its resources are best placed to help councils with immediate challenges presenting now and in the future. With this impetus, the vast majority of the LGA's operation is now focussed on supporting local government and communities to address COVID-19 and its consequences. This page summarises the current refocused support offer. Councils who wish to access any element of the support outlined should contact their [Principal Advisor](#).
2. The LGA will continue to update its support offer on COVID-19 in line with the shifting challenges that the sector is facing. Over time, the focus of our support will likely to move to supporting councils on COVID-19 recovery and transition issues and, when appropriate, returning to our wider improvement support offer. We are encouraging feedback from councils on the types of support that they would most welcome going forward in relation to COVID-19.
3. In addition, the LGA has developed guidance for councils on COVID-19 on specific issues relevant to councillors' involvement in our work leading and protecting our communities, supporting remote council meetings and supporting vulnerable people, amongst others. Links to this guidance and wider COVID-19 support can be found [here](#). The LGA has also used LG Inform to create two COVID-19 reports showing cases data over time, the rate per 100,000 people, and the top ten councils for cases (by total number, as a rate, and by the biggest number on a single day) on a daily basis which can be found [here](#).

### **Principal Adviser support to councils**

4. Our network of Principal Advisers and small regional teams are dedicating all their capacity to directly supporting and advise councils as they look to address the COVID-19 crisis.
5. As the regionally based link into the LGA for all councils, Principal Advisers are a key conduit between local and central government; ensuring local, regional and individual council issues are informing the national response.
6. Where councils require bespoke support in specific areas such as Children's and Adults services, Principal Advisers can link you with our Care and Health Improvement Advisers and Children's Improvement Advisers. They can also link you with specialists in the LGA across a range of place based, people based, finance and governance services and can access political support and mentoring for elected members via our political group offices and regional peers.

7. The LGA recognises the need for clear communication with the right Government departments, at the right time. As such, we are co-ordinating the work of the Nine Regional lead Chief Executives and MHCLG through the leadership of the LGA's Chief Executive, Mark Lloyd, with support from the rest of the LGA. Our Principal Advisers are also building on their well-established networks to increasingly work more closely with the relevant lead Chief Executive in each region, Local Resilience Forums/SCGs and regional civil servants to support the co-ordination and streamlining of activity, to avoid duplication and reduce burdens on councils.
8. Throughout this period, the LGA is also retaining the flexibility to divert and help identify resource and expertise to support councils who are facing the most significant challenges.

#### **Peer challenge and remote peer support**

9. In Late March, our on-site peer challenge activity was suspended until September. Work is already underway to develop a programme of peer led support and challenge that can be delivered within the "COVID-19 secure" guidelines over the next 4-5 months. We are rapidly working up proposals to support councils on recovery through remote, peer-based support, including the potential for remote recovery peer panels and bespoke remote peer support. This will utilise our peer network but also harnesses technology by utilising video conferencing and collaborative working tools to enable officer and member peers from across the country to share learning and practice in a safe and secure environment. The programme will pilot these approaches in June with a view to a extensive roll out over the July-October period. If members of the Improvement and Innovation Board would be willing for their councils to be involved in the pilots, please contact Gary Hughes ([gary.hughes@local.gov.uk](mailto:gary.hughes@local.gov.uk)) who is Programme lead for remote peer support.
10. Some councils are keen to carry out formal peer challenges during the autumn and we are working to a resumption of these in October onwards. The format of these will depend on social distancing rules at the time and we are working on a number of possible formats, working closely with those councils who want a peer challenge.

#### **Supporting Leadership**

11. The scale of the challenge that councils are currently facing requires strong, responsive and resilient leadership. To address this, we are refocusing our leadership offer so that senior councillors and officers have access to learning resources and the ability to share their experiences with their peers. This includes ensuring that councillors have access to online leadership tools that support their vital community leadership role in their national effort to respond to COVID-19, including through neighbourhood and community engagement.

Support currently available:

- **We've upgraded our [councillor e-learning platform](#)** and made it easier to access. A new module "Holding council meetings online" has recently been added.
- **A series of webinars to support councillors and political leaders** – The first in series will be on the role of the ward councillor in responding to the COVID-19 crisis. Moving forward, there will be specific focus on the roles of the Cabinet Member, leadership in opposition and Finance. The webinars will combine pre-recorded short videos and live discussions with Q&As.
- **[A private KHub group](#)** – This has been set up to provide remote online networks, where councillors can share their learning, practice and experiences on themed portfolio areas. The group is being facilitated by LGA staff and will continue to build content over time. Intelligence will be used to inform future initiatives for councillors as they manage the COVID-19 outbreak and its consequences. Please note that a simple sign up/login process is required to ensure the privacy of the group.
- **A workbook on 'Being an effective cabinet member'** – This [guidebook](#) is a distance learning aid to support cabinet members in their role, including decision-making, whole cabinet working, leadership styles in times of crisis and officer/member relationships.
- **Key questions and issues for Finance Portfolio Holders during the COVID-19 pandemic** – A [new guidance note](#) including key questions that lead members with responsibility for Finance could be asking during the response and recovery phases of the COVID-19 outbreak.
- **One-to-one leadership development** – For the next three months, councillors in leadership positions are able to access one-to-one development conversations with Leadership Academy Facilitators. These sessions will be focussed on helping councillors adapt their leadership style through three structured coaching calls.
- **Other resources** – This range will include a new mental health hub for elected members and an e-learning unit on handling intimidation. These resources and others will be available to support councillors as part of [the LGA's civility in public life programme](#).

The LGA is also working with Solace to offer [executive coaching](#) to chief executives and nominated senior officers.

### **Financial Resilience**

12. The LGA has repurposed its expert financial associates to support councils with the new and enhanced challenges during this period. We will work collaboratively with other stakeholders to deliver this and ensure that councils have the guidance they need.
13. Coming out of the immediate crisis, financial leadership support will respond to the changed circumstances we find around us. We are identifying ways that our diagnostic approach can support councils with the greatest COVID-19 related financial challenges.

We are also providing support to councils experiencing difficulties in their commercial activities given the current financial climate and identifying experts who can support local economies as the work toward a position of recovery in the future.

### **Adult Social Care**

14. The Care and Health Improvement Programme is the sector-led improvement programme for adult social care funded by the Department of Health and Social Care and delivered jointly with the Association of Directors of Social Services and Association of Directors of Public Health.
15. We are now offering a refocused programme of support to councils, tailored to individual needs. This includes guidance and advice on implementation, bespoke support and webinars, around the following themes:
  - 15.1. **Whole systems improvement** – focusing on the interface with hospitals but continuing support around transforming care and looking to capture/share innovations that are happening on the ground
  - 15.2. **Sustainable, safe and personalised care** – developing guidance addressing provider concerns with partners around PPE, safety and human rights, good commissioning and financial resilience.
  - 15.3. **Prevention and wellbeing** – concentrating on issues surrounding volunteering, shielding and how social care works with Community Hubs.
  - 15.4. **Social justice** – providing emergency legislation support on guidance and roll out and ensuring that marginalised groups (e.g. rough sleepers, substance misusers, people with behaviour that challenges, people with mental ill health) are supported and protected.
  - 15.5. **National and local data** – analysis of latest information including daily sitreps on the state of social care at local authority level available online from LG Inform.
16. This support also links to wider LGA support for financial and governance resilience, workforce capacity and expertise to support government.

### **Children's Services**

17. Our network of regional Children's Improvement Advisors (CIAs) are working closely with Directors of Children's Services across the country to identify and address issues and challenges, share practice across places and agree opportunities to use limited resources differently and develop new, joint approaches. Analysis from CIAs provides Department for Education (DfE) officials with insights into challenges facing the sector,

letting them know where improved clarity and guidance is urgently required. CIAs will also play an active role in the new regional REACT forums are being established to provide a single point of contact with DfE.

18. The LGA is working closely with the Department for Education and ADCS to ensure children's services and education departments have the information, powers, funding and flexibilities to continue to meet the needs of vulnerable children, including those with SEND.
19. New ways to support lead members for children's services are also being considered and the South West have hosted the first virtual lead member network, with a view to this being rolled out in other regions.

### **Workforce Capacity and Support**

20. The LGA workforce team continues to support councils by sharing good practice across the sector to maximise economics of scale, saving time and resources. This includes supporting on-line regional webinars, forums and networks to collate and share practice across councils on how to respond to workforce issues as they emerge. The support will include weekly updates on regional activity shared via bulletins.
21. Our workforce team are producing regular guidance for councils on the workforce implications of COVID-19, including additional guidance on the Critical Workers issues. They are also working closely with the trade unions to provide guidance for authorities on issues such as sick pay, contractual treatment of self-isolation and home working.
22. LGA Workforce Planning programme will continue to help councils with advice and guidance on workforce planning to meet their workforce needs. This will include refocused support to help councils develop redeployment practices to keep vital services operating during the COVID-19 outbreak. The programme will provide online advice and support to facilitate virtual networks and operate an online community of practice.
23. The workforce team have also been working closely with Social Work England, and Government on a campaign to encourage social workers to come back to work to assist councils, tying in with the existing Return to Social Work programme. Following a public call to all social workers who have been off the register for up to 2 years (and who have been placed on a temporary register by Social Work England) to return to work, those who are interested will be able to register their interest and details on our LGA platform. This platform adds their details to a talent pool that councils can access directly.
24. The LGA will continue to operate the apprenticeship programme to support councils with updates, advice and guidance, both in responding to queries and in offering support to help councils maintain existing apprenticeship programmes.

## **Procurement**

25. The procurement programme is now focusing on procurement and supply chain issues arising out of the COVID-19 emergency. We are updating councils regularly on procurement policy and guidance working together with MHCLG, Cabinet Office and other key departments to ensure that councils concerns regarding essential supplies are escalated. We will continue to provide financial and other information relating to local government's key/'at risk' suppliers and include additional support to councils who identify particular procurement or supply chain issues that are best responded to on a regional or national basis.

## **Digital Connectivity**

26. A central focus is on how councils can use digital solutions to respond to COVID-19 within the community, reducing social isolation, supporting council staff to work remotely and councils to hold public meetings virtually – and on sharing this practice among the sector. Councils have raised concerns about connectivity and the LGA is working with mobile and broadband providers to enable councils to identify highlight issues.

27. The LGA also developed, in partnership with a number of stakeholders, the Remote Council Meetings Hub which is a central pool of information, advice and guidance from our partners across the sector. The hub was developed rapidly and launched just before Easter. The hub is supporting councils to launch full council, committee meetings and other forms of local democracy online and has been accessed by over 200 councils.

## **Communications**

28. The LGA have commissioned work to develop rapid and practical advice on community engagement. We are using our communications experts to provide support and advice to councils facing strategic communication issues around COVID-19 as these develop. The LGA is also capturing examples of where councils have adopted good practice in tackling coronavirus on a dedicated webpage and is encouraging further contributions through the daily bulletin. These examples are being collated centrally on our website and shared amongst all councils to facilitate widespread learning across the sector.

## **Ongoing Activity**

29. Though COVID-19 response support has become the main focus of our support offer, some existing and ongoing support activity continues.

30. The impact of a cyber security attack on a council at a time when many are working remotely will be extensive. We will continue to engage with councils to raise awareness of cyber security and associated good practice. We will also work with councils to increase the number of cyber security trained personnel and develop some exemplar policy tools and frameworks. We are also looking to have a flexible arrangement that will

21 May 2020

allow us to provide resources to respond to cyber-incidents and cyber-security related needs as and when they arise.

31. The LGA is also continuing its climate change support programme. This programme seeks to provide councils and residents support in reaching their local carbon reduction targets to prevent the onset and mitigate the effects, of climate change. The LGA webpage brings together an overview of the LGA support offer, including our innovation and leadership programmes associated with climate change, relevant publications and notable practice case studies. We will develop this source of support for local authority officers over the coming months.

### **Implications for Wales**

32. We are working closely with WLGA colleagues and councils to share learning from this refocused activity.

### **Financial Implications**

33. Given the unprecedented challenge of COVID-19 for local and national Government alike, MHCLG and IDeA have agreed that in the first six months of the agreement under the Memorandum of Understanding regarding the provision of support and assistance to the local government sector (until September 2020), support activity will be refocused and dedicated to supporting councils in their central role in tackling COVID-19.

### **Next steps**

34. Officers to continue shaping the provision of support to councils subject to Board's comments.