

Improvement support to councils on climate change

Purpose of report

For information.

Summary

Following the declaration of a climate emergency at the LGA conference in July 2019, the LGA has developed an improvement and support offer for councils to address the climate response.

The purpose of the LGA climate change improvement and support programme is to enable councils and residents to reach their local carbon reduction targets to adapt, prevent the onset, and mitigate the effects, of climate change.

This paper covers the progress made since 18 March 2020 (when the climate change programme last reported to the Board). This includes the array of support offered in the last four months and the plans for the rest of the financial year 2020/21.

Recommendation

That the Improvement and Innovation Board note the update on the actions taken under the LGA climate change improvement programme and supports the proposals for the rest of the financial year.

Actions

Officers to continue delivering the climate change improvement and support offer.

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Improvement support to councils on climate change

Background

1. In July 2019, the LGA General Assembly passed a motion calling upon the government to explore the domestic implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through funded partnership roles with local authority areas, encouraging councils to continue to link local priorities with the overall ambitions of the SDGs and declaring a climate emergency.
2. One year on, the LGA has developed a comprehensive climate change improvement and support offer for councils which meets the needs of local authorities. This includes an array of support being offered across the improvement division in sharing good practice, leadership, productivity, research and information, as well as Local Partnerships.

Progress since March 2020

Sharing good practice

3. The LGA [Climate Change web hub](#), which houses all the information about our existing and developing offer, including numerous [case studies and examples of notable practice](#), continues to be updated with new offers of support and good practice. The hub received 1,635 visits from April 1 – June 9 2020.
4. The LGA has collated a webpage which contains climate change [resources from elsewhere](#). Please find research from universities, charities and the OECD with a local focus to assist councils in the climate change action plans.
5. A First Magazine [article](#) was published in May on the topic of *A green silver lining?* Following the pandemic, it covers the benefits to climate change when holding remote council meetings. Councillor Liz Green and Councillor Andrew Cooper by-lined and wrote a case study for the publication respectively.
6. Councils are continuing to make use of the 'Climate Emergency Network' Knowledge Hub online group to ask questions, share practice and discuss key issues.
7. In a virtual world, we have been able to offer events to a greater number of people meaning that geography and travel is now no barrier. We therefore adapted the planned 'regional events' to an [LGA green webinar series](#). Four events have already been delivered:

- 7.1 **Renewable Energy** (June 5): Delivered in partnership with Aurora Energy Research and Local Partnerships, and supported by the LGA. Investment in renewable energy projects is becoming increasingly popular as a means both to

meet climate change targets and to generate commercial income to support service provision. In advance of the LGA *Good Practice Guide to Renewable Energy* launch, authored by Local Partnerships, a masterclass webinar was hosted to help local and combined authorities explore how to be confident in making data-driven investment in renewable energy projects.

7.2 Decarbonising transport in a post COVID-19 world (June 18): The COVID crisis has had a profound effect on travel patterns. In recovery, we have an opportunity to change travel behaviours. The Government has announced it is prioritising active travel measures, and the crisis will have also accelerated a trend towards remote working for some sectors of the economy. Social distancing rules have fundamentally changed the operation of public transport and it is unclear how the sector will be able to recover from the disruption. The webinar sought to discuss all these areas of the post corona challenge and gave speakers from Government, Academia and NGOs the opportunity to share their thinking.

7.3 Greening Procurement (June 24): jointly run by the Business Services Association and the Local Government Association, was an online workshop to explore the climate emergency and how local government and businesses can work together on meeting local carbon reduction goals. During the session, the following was covered:

7.3.1. The climate emergency and the work of local authorities in helping to prevent climate change and mitigating its effects

7.3.2. The ways in which councils have worked to reduce carbon emissions in the communities they represent

7.3.3. The role of the private sector and Voluntary and Community Sector stakeholders in working with councils to these ends

7.3.4. Best practice in incorporating sustainability as a factor in the public procurement process, including through the Social Value Act.

Councillor Neil Prior, Vice Chair of the Improvement and Innovation Board co-chaired the event with a BSA member. Other speakers included the Social Value Portal, Hull City Council, Surrey County Council, Veolia and Engie.

7.4 Spotlight on... Green reset (July 1 - part of the LGA annual conference): The webinar focused on how local government can work towards a sustainable recovery and seize opportunities given to us from the COVID-19 pandemic. Cllr Liz Green, Vice Chair of the Improvement and Innovation Board, chaired the meeting and outlined how the pandemic has caused an unforeseen switch in people's behaviours and attitudes. The global lockdown has not only meant that

we have had to drastically change the way we work and live, it has also given us the opportunity to do so in a way that will benefit our environment and help us to reach our carbon reduction goals. The webinar also heard insights from Councillor David Renard (Swindon Borough Council), Jo Wall (Local Partnerships), Mike Cockburn (Wirral Council) and Councillor Clyde Loakes (London Borough of Waltham Forest). It was attended by 388 people.

8. If you were unable to attend the webinars, you can access the content on the [LGA green webinar series webpage](#).
9. In addition, on May 28, the LGA presented at a webinar run by Ashden about the opportunities for green reset post the pandemic peak, and how the LGA climate change improvement programme could support. 110 local authorities attended the event.
10. A review of the LGA's peer challenge offer has recommended that each Corporate Peer Challenge explores whether the council has considered relevant information relating to climate change in setting its priorities.

Leadership and Scrutiny

11. Following two successful Leadership Essentials events for councillors, the third [Climate Emergency Leadership Essentials programme](#) for Leaders and Portfolio Holders will take place on October 22 and 23 2020.
12. To support members in ensuring effective scrutiny on climate change, the Centre for Public Scrutiny were commissioned to produce guidance on '10 Questions to ask when scrutinising services to tackle climate change'. The guidance will provide advice on key issues which scrutiny boards might need to inquire into in order to effectively scrutinise those issues. The guide will be soft launched over the summer and a webinar on how to practically use it is scheduled for September 2020.
13. The guide covers ten questions which could form areas of focus or workstreams for the LGA climate change improvement and support programme as it evolves. It is clear that the UK Government target to reach net zero by 2050 makes this a thirty-year programme and the LGA is thinking in this way when creating plans to support councils in the coming years.

Productivity

14. Our [Design in the Public Sector](#) programme, which equips councils with design skills and techniques to apply to their toughest service challenges, is focusing solely on climate change for 2020-21. Councils have already made use of the programme and best practice has been shared on the LGA website. The 2020/21 programme will launch over the summer.

15. A brand-new programme entitled 'Universities and Councils: Partnership working towards net zero' is being created. The LGA has been working to partner universities with councils to explore ways of achieving their carbon emission targets. Universities have been working in the climate change space for a substantial period of time and therefore have invaluable research that can help councils in achieving their ambitions. The LGA are working with universities to not only introduce them to their local councils but to expand partnership networks across the whole country. Please find some [blog posts](#) on how the LGA and UCL has facilitated council and university partnerships across England thus far, taking us a step closer to reducing our carbon emissions.
16. In April, the LGA and the University College London collaboratively delivered four webinars for councils and their local universities. Building on this success, phase two of the programme is being worked up. The purpose is for councils and their local universities to work on a collaborative demonstrator climate change project. They will attend four webinars to coproduce a proposal and then partake in six months of assisted delivery followed by three months of evaluation and sharing the learning with councils and universities across England. This will be assisted by LGA grant funding for councils.
17. Councils can use procurement to achieve wider financial and non-financial outcomes, including improving wellbeing of individuals and communities, social value and improved environment. [Climate emergency social value themes, outcomes and measures](#) have been published. The 2020 TOMs have been launched with extra emphasis and focus on providing councils and organisations with measures specifically dedicated to reducing and mitigating the risks of climate change in our communities.

Research and information

18. We are conducting a climate change survey of English councils to understand the actions they are taking to address climate change, as well as to identify any policy changes we should be campaigning for to support councils in this work. In order to not add extra pressure on to councils at this time, we left the survey open on the [LGA climate change support webpage](#) and will close it when appropriate. We have so far received 86 responses.
19. In collaboration with Local Partnerships, we are developing a tool for councils to consistently measure their carbon emissions data in the same way nationwide. It will enable councils to measure the impact of their carbon saving initiatives and compare successes in a standardised way. This will be free for all councils to use. User acceptance testing with districts, counties and London councils was carried out in June. It will be soft launched over the summer and a webinar will take place on September 11 2020.

Local Partnerships

20. Local Partnerships is providing [services](#) in key climate response areas including energy efficiency, waste, housing, regeneration and growth, air quality, energy, finance, infrastructure, digital transformation and health and social care.

Governance

21. The Climate Change Improvement and Innovation Board working group have met twice since March, once in May to primarily discuss the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats posed to climate change following the COVID-19 pandemic peak and again in July to discuss the improvement programme's progress and work going forward including COP26.
22. Separately, the Environment, Energy, Housing and Transport Board has been taking forward work on lobbying and colleagues have put forward a [number of asks from government](#). In June, the [LGA published research on local green jobs](#), looking to accelerate a sustainable green recovery from COVID-19. A decarbonising energy report will also be available in July.

Future work in 2020/21

Sharing good practice

23. **A series of multimedia packages:** Led by senior leaders in the sector, topics such as 'Don't be left in the dark on climate change', engaging your whole place in climate action and climate terminology will be covered to provide a foundation of knowledge and skills for everyone.
24. **Communications:** We have published the [New Conversation 2.0](#) guide about engaging in dialogue with residents, from consultations through to people's everyday interactions with their local authority, including on issues of climate change. We have commissioned a supplier to create new guidance for councils on engaging with their communities, activists and government on the issue of climate change. This has been paused during the pandemic but when appropriate, will be part of [#FutureComms](#) – our online resource to help councils to develop and deliver effective communications.
25. **Webinars:** Future webinars will include the launch of the Centre for Public Scrutiny ten questions, and the carbon emissions measurement tool for councils.

Leadership

26. **Member leadership:** We published an ['Acting on climate change' councillor workbook](#) in 2017, which is designed to help councillors think about the roles, opportunities and drivers for council-led action on changing the climate. This is due to be refreshed in 2020/21.

27. **Officer leadership:** We will explore through our partnership with SOLACE opportunities for officer development.

Productivity

28. **Behavioural insights:** A number of councils have made use of our [Behavioural Insights Programme](#) to help residents make better choices for themselves and society, including around waste, recycling, idling outside of schools and sustainable travel. Amongst other services, the programme will continue to provide support to councils to tackle climate change issues. The LGA will also produce guidance to help councils to use Behavioural Insights tools and techniques to address local climate change challenges.

29. **Procurement:** The LGA will be updating the LGA sustainable procurement guide in 2020. The updated guidance will focus on procurement from a whole life basis in terms of generating benefits not only to councils, but also to society and the economy, whilst minimising damage to the environment and embedding effective sustainable procurement practices within our processes.

Research and information

30. **Research:** Councils have expressed an ask for some research to be done under the following question: 'What can councils and their partners do in the immediate, medium and the longer term which will have the greatest impact in reducing carbon emissions?' The LGA will be looking to commission some research to explore this further.
31. **Research:** There are many lessons which we can learn from COVID-19 and though different, there are striking similarities between the pandemic and climate change - both are emergency responses, both are international crises which have local actions and implications, and both have an impact on more vulnerable communities disproportionately. This thinking is yet to be refined but there is potential to explore the opportunities to learn from COVID-19 and to take them forward in local climate action plans.

Implications for Wales

32. While the funding for this programme is reserved for councils in England, we actively are engaging with our Wales Local Government Association colleagues, sharing learning and will work collaboratively on any common issues.

Financial Implications

33. The support offer is funded through our Improvement Grant from the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government through the Memorandum of Understanding.

Next steps

34. Officers to continue delivering the climate change improvement and support offer.