

## **Improvement and Innovation Board – from Cllr Peter Fleming OBE (Chairman)**

### **Sector-led Improvement Review**

1. During the first half of the year the Improvement and Innovation Board commissioned Shared Intelligence to carry out an evaluation of the Sector-led Improvement (SLI) programme delivered by the LGA using MHCLG grant funding. Shared Intelligence were also asked to provide some reflections on how SLI can be enhanced in the future and were also able to provide some thoughts from a post-COVID perspective.
2. Shared Intelligence have now completed these reviews. At the time of writing both reviews were due to be sent to the Improvement and Innovation Board for final comment, but the final drafts provide a very positive evaluation of the LGA's SLI offer but also offer some helpful reflections in relation to engagement with the sector, the use of data, the nature of funding and supporting councils facing significant challenges.
3. LGA officers will now start a conversation with the sector over the next two months with a view to setting out a new enhanced vision for SLI and to find out what different types of support the sector would find helpful in both the short and long term.
4. In addition, the LGA has carried out a 'stocktake' of its peer challenge offer. This review has found that the offer is well-regarded, has high levels of take-up in the sector, offers comparatively good value for money and has evolved over time. It is politically informed, proportionate and sector-led. The stocktake has identified areas for development, some of which echo findings in the Shared Intelligence evaluation of Sector-led Improvement. The LGA will now implement the review's detailed recommendations.

### **LGA Annual Conference – 'Spotlight on' series**

#### **Spotlight on Learning through Crisis (30 June)**

5. Our first Spotlight Session focused on 'Learning through Crisis' and the lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic so far. Cllr Neil Prior, Cabinet Member for Transformation at Pembrokeshire Council and a lead member on the LGA's Improvement and Innovation Board, chaired the session which highlighted just a few examples of innovative work councils have done in responding to the coronavirus crisis. Speakers included Laura Fisher, from Shropshire Council, who discussed their partnership approach to homelessness, Donna Nolan, Managing Director at Watford District Council who spoke on the meaning of leadership through crisis, Gail Teasdale who talked us through Hull City Council's role in developing a website for young people to access to a range of targeted guidance and support, and finally, Liz Harrison who outlined Hackney Council's use of data and insight to identify those most vulnerable in the community and target support.

### **Spotlight on Green reset (1 July)**

6. 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 Cllr David Renard (Swindon Borough Council), Jo Wall (Local Partnerships), Mike Cockburn (Wirral Council) and Cllr Clyde Loakes (London Borough of Waltham Forest). It was attended by 388 people.

### **Spotlight on the Councillor (7 July)**

7. Spotlight on the Councillor webinar showcased the rapid response of councillors during COVID-19. Cllr Judi Billing, Deputy Chair of the Improvement and Innovation Board, chaired the session highlighting how the pandemic has changed the ways we work and the importance of building on this for the future. The webinar heard practical examples from Cllr Caroline Clapper (Hertsmere Borough Council), Cllr Oliver Ryan (Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council), Cllr William Hounbo (London Borough of Southwark) and Cllr Sarah Rouse (Malvern Hills District Council) on how they have worked in different and innovative ways to meet the needs of their residents and what they have learnt from the experience. Questions were asked about the importance of diversity in local politics, protecting our mental health as councillors and supporting each other.

### **Spotlight on Sector-led Improvement (8 July)**

8. Our second session at the LGA's virtual Annual Conference was 'Spotlight on Sector-led Improvement (SLI) where we reflected on our SLI offer in a post-COVID world. Over 150 people attended the webinar giving their views on SLI via our online poll and a question and answer session. I spoke alongside a panel of excellent speakers including Kath O'Dwyer, Chief Executive of St Helens Council and Gavin Jones, Chief Executive of Essex County Council, as well as Aileen Murphie, Director for Local Government at NAO.
9. I then joined a panel alongside my Improvement and Innovation Board colleagues and lead members, Cllr Judi Billing, Cllr Liz Green and Cllr Neil Prior. The lively debate was expertly chaired by Mike Burton, Editorial Director of the MJ and was followed by reflections from the lead members of the Improvement and Innovation Board. The LGA will be taking the feedback from the conference session and seeing how we can make our SLI offer even stronger, reflecting on the challenges and experiences of councils up and down the country in the post-COVID world.

### **Remote Meetings**

10. At the beginning of April, I launched our [Remote Meetings hub](#), to support councils in their new powers to hold public meetings virtually by using video or telephone conferencing technology. The hub provides guidance, case studies and directs councils to peer to peer support to ensure that we can continue to make decisions about the

future of our localities, enable democratic participation from applicants and residents, and maintain momentum on major developments in our boundaries while adhering to social distancing. Under current legislation remote council meetings are legally permitted until May 2021 and as it stands there is no confirmation if the legislation will ensure the continuation of remote council meetings past this current date. The Improvement Directorate is currently exploring options with the Executive Advisory Board about working with government to provide further flexibility for local authorities to opt for remote council meetings or hybrid versions as lockdown eases.

### **Climate change**

11. 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.
12. 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.
13. 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](#) including the *Greening Procurement* webinar on 24 June, 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. 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.

### **LG Inform**

14. July sees the seventh birthday of LG Inform, our data service for councils. Fittingly, we have just passed the notable milestone of having received over 2 million page views since its launch. Usage of LG Inform has been steadily increasing this year and, since the publication of our COVID-19 reports, our monthly page views have rocketed from 20-30 thousand per month to over 75,000 a month. In June we achieved a record 107,000 views. The wide range of data reports we now maintain can be found here: [LG Inform themed reports](#).

### **Residents' satisfaction**

15. As you may be aware, the LGA regularly commissions polling of residents to test their satisfaction with local services and their trust in councils. In June we conducted and published the results of our most recent survey of the public, and the results this time were notable. They showed that satisfaction with local councils reached its highest level ([the full report](#) can be downloaded from our website). The particular highlights from the report include:

15.1.75 per cent of respondents are satisfied with the way their local council runs things. This is the highest level recorded in this series of public polling. The rolling average is 67 per cent.

15.2.71 per cent of respondents trust their local council. This result has increased by 12 percentage points since the last round of polling in February. Trust in one's council has not previously reached the 70 per cent mark in this series of polling.

## **Procurement**

16. We held four online meetings with councils in relation to our strategic providers of Children's services namely Cambian, Keys, Witherslack and Priory. The meetings were very well attended by the top 20 spending councils for each provider and gave us the opportunity to have interactive discussions with councils to identify their priorities for future strategic conversations with the sector. Three of the four providers posed some problems for councils in relation to performance, i.e. not achieving the desired outcomes for children but a lack of sufficient provision in the market meant that councils had to continue to use these providers in the short and medium term. There was a distinct move towards councils saying they would like to move to smaller, local provision or maybe bring back these services in-house and there was appetite for councils to work together and speak as one voice in this market.
17. Our national advisory group agreed to set up a sub-group relating to PPE following the issues arising from COVID-19. We have wide participation in this with LGA facilitating councils sharing data relating to prices, quality, delivery of various PPE items. We have started to consider how we can shape the national market to deliver a 'make' strategy for PPE using our local supply chains and are working with Cabinet Office and MHCLG on moving this forward.
18. We have been working closely with Cabinet Office to ensure the new Procurement Policy Notes (PPNs) reflect the needs of councils and have started a new conversation on what any new procurement rules will include post-Brexit.

## **The Cyber Security Programme**

19. The Cyber Security Programme team has continued to work closely with the National Cyber Security Centre and others to highlight and mitigate COVID-19 related risks – as highlighted in the recently released NCSC Local Government Cyberthreat report. We continue to bring together policy makers and practitioners on a fortnightly basis to ensure that we can respond appropriately. We also continue to encourage councils to participate in the Cabinet Office and MHCLG's ransomware survey and their wider discovery work on Cyber Security in local government.
20. Building on the previous success of the programme – where we directly supported over 90% of English Councils to improve cyber security via c£3.1M of direct targeted grants – we have reviewed the use of grants in over 95% of councils who have received them. We have also agreed, with the Cabinet Office, a new statement of work for this financial year. It includes: promoting NCSC Cyber Tools, assisting any victim Local Authority in

responding to a major cyber incident, supporting the LG Cyber Technical Advisory Groups in the development of good practice, increasing the number of Cyber Security qualified personnel in Local Government and a penetration testing pilot study with a small number of partner councils.

### **Leadership Support**

21. As part of the Spotlight on the Councillor webinar at the LGA virtual Annual Conference, Cllr Judi Billing launched an [updated version of the COVID-19 councillor guidance](#) that was originally published in March alongside our new [councillor guidance on reset and recovery](#) which looks at the role that councillors can play as we move out of lockdown and focus on supporting our places and communities through the process of recovery.
22. We also launched two new Leadership webinars, which [support councillors and political leaders](#). Firstly, a two-part webinar on Effective Opposition that discuss the importance of the contributions of opposition councillors and groups and supports opposition groups in their work on Covid-19. Secondly, a single session webinar on Rapid Innovation that provides an opportunity to explore both the theory and practice as to how to lead council's response to the challenges of Covid-19 and supports Council leaders with a role to play in encouraging and supporting rapid innovation and change. Two live Rapid Innovation webinars are planned for August, co-chaired by Councillor Liz Green and Councillor Bryony Rudkin.
23. Our one-to-one coaching offer is focussed on helping councillors in leadership positions to adapt their personal leadership style through three structured coaching calls. This offer has been taken up by 40 senior councillors.

### **Press and external communications**

24. Since the last Forum, I have commented on the following LGA press releases and external communications on behalf of the Board:
  - 24.1. 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.
  - 24.2. During the crisis the Supply Chain Response team has been issuing weekly COVID-19 bulletins with the most up-to-date information, guidance, offers of support and funding from central government with a weekly readership climbing close to 1500 local officers.
  - 24.3. A reminder that our Sector Led improvement work is also detailed in the LGA's [First magazine](#).

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