

Improvement and Innovation Board: Review of the Year

1. A particular highlight of the year was the positive findings emanating from our wide-ranging evaluation of sector-led improvement (published in May) that sought views from national stakeholders (including officials from government departments and the inspectorates), council leaders, chief executives and directors, and monitored a wide range of performance metrics.
2. The research findings demonstrate that:
 - 2.1. **Residents remain satisfied** with, and continue to trust, their local council, despite the increasing financial constraints being faced by the sector. More than two-thirds of people (70 per cent) are very/fairly satisfied with the way their council runs things and when asked whether they trusted councils or Government most to make decisions about how services were provided in their local area, 77 per cent of people said local councils.
 - 2.2. **Councils' performance continues to improve.** Analysis of a series of 97 metrics, across the full range of council activity shows a positive direction of travel, with approximately three quarters of the metrics having seen an improvement since 2010.
 - 2.3. The approach and offer of **support from the LGA is welcomed and valued by councils.** In a survey of senior members and officers, 93 per cent of leaders who were aware of the offer and 93 per cent of chief executives said that the support and resources offered by the LGA had had a positive impact on their authority.
3. This is a considerable achievement for the sector against a backdrop of councils nationally having their funding cut by 40 per cent in real terms since 2010, increased demographic pressures and national policy changes.

Innovation

4. The successful "Creative Councils" programme with NESTA drew to a close at a national showcasing event in November, following which we have reviewed and refreshed our work on innovation with a view to developing a more co-ordinated approach across the LGA with greater focus on dissemination of good practice. A key element has been the **Innovation Zone** at the LGA's Annual Conference, with opportunities to hear from over 40 different councils over three days sharing their innovative approaches to service redesign, demand management and use of new technologies.

Improvement

5. We have again increased the number of **peer challenges** delivered, from 96 in 2011/12, 136 in 2012/13 to 166 in 2013/14, across a wide range of service areas including 86 new corporate peer challenges. The external evaluation by Cardiff Business School reported in January and judged the corporate peer challenge to be delivering positive impacts and outcomes for the sector, with the quality of peer teams judged to be of an extremely high calibre. By March 2014, councils had contributed more than 2,500 days of senior councillor and officer time to Corporate Peer Challenge teams representing a considerable investment by the sector in its own improvement, equivalent to millions of pounds worth of consultancy.

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 29 councils; bespoke peer mentoring support to 64 councils; delivery of top team development work to 13 councils; follow-up support to 55 councils who received peer challenge; and direct improvement support to 63 councils e.g. around financial sustainability or where councils are facing specific improvement challenges.
7. In March 2014, following a competitive bidding process, the LGA was appointed to create a new independent company to act as a **transitional body** when the Audit Commission closes. It will be responsible for managing the Commission's £85 million audit contracts as well as the Value for Money profiles when it closes at the end of March 2015. This will provide a solid foundation from which to offer the sector an approach to national procurement, which is estimated to save the public purse between £205 and £250 million over a five year period when compared against local appointment.

Productivity

8. Through our productivity programme we have been supporting councils with pooling resources and redesigning services, identifying the key productivity gains for local government and making sure councils deliver these savings quickly. For example:
 - 8.1. We have captured and promoted good practice of councils **sharing services**. Our interactive web-based map includes examples from 337 councils engaged in 383 shared service arrangements resulting in £357 million of efficiency savings.
 - 8.2. The joint LGA/Cabinet Office **One Public Estate programme** to help local and central government asset holders rationalize assets across central and local government is proving successful. To date the programme has seen the 12 local authorities involved save £88 million in capital receipts with £21 million in running costs with further long term savings expected. As a result the programme was extended in March 2014 as part of the Budget announcement, enabling a further 15 councils to participate.
 - 8.3. The **Adult Social Care Efficiency (ASCE) Programme** is now in its third and final year. Visits have been made to all 54 participating authorities to evaluate progress against objectives and gather evidence of efficiency savings. A concluding event will be held on 17 July when the final report will be published.
 - 8.4. **The Productivity Expert programme** has now funded over 40 councils to enable them to engage an expert to provide the necessary skills and expertise to help deliver efficiency savings. An investment of £150,000 of LGA funding is contributing to efficiency savings and income generation of over £53 million being identified and delivered by participating councils.
 - 8.5. Our evaluation of the **Customer-Led Transformation programme**, which provided support to 63 projects, highlighted that the programme delivered over £331 million of financial benefit to the public and public services.
 - 8.6. A combination of LGA lobbying and practical support enabled councils to get through the new "zero tolerance" compliance process for the **Public Service Network**

introduced by the Cabinet Office. The public sector wide secure network enables the sharing of data securely, council to council, and council to government (and vice versa).

Supporting Political and Managerial Leadership

9. We have completed a thorough **review of our leadership offer** and will be launching the new offer at Annual Conference. “Highlighting Leadership” is the new umbrella brand encompassing the three refreshed and revised areas of leadership development support provided by the LGA: Political Leadership; Managerial Leadership and Top Team Leadership.
10. At the same time we continued to deliver a wide range of programmes designed to support local politicians, as they get to grips with the tremendous challenges facing the public sector. For example, our:
 - 10.1. highly acclaimed **Leadership programmes** have supported almost 560 councillors in 2013-14, with 506 councillors attending the Leadership Academy. We have also provided support for a further 52 councillors through the **Next Generation** programme, which supports councillors with the potential to become the next set of leaders or cabinet members; and
 - 10.2. **the National Graduate Development Programme (ngdp)** continues to be successful in attracting new officers into local government. The 2013 ngdp (Cohort 15) intake are coming to the end of their first year on the programme, with almost 90 graduates working in 40 councils across England and Wales. There has been a surge in demand this year with 120 places in over 50 councils across England and Wales.

Transparency

11. We have continued to help councils get to grips with the implications of the Code of Practice for Local Authorities on **Data Transparency**. Following LGA lobbying, Defra has approved £2.7 million in new burdens funding to local authorities to meet the Infrastructure for Spatial Information in the European Community Regulations 2009 (INSPIRE) obligations to publish geospatial data about the environment. We also secured £1 million in open data funding for authorities, via BIS’ local open data Breakthrough Fund.
12. The new version of **LG Inform**, our on-line data and benchmarking service, was successfully launched to both councils and the public in the autumn. It now has 92 per cent of councils registered and 2000 registered users; since its launch, the public site has had 32,331 visits from 15,418 unique visitors. We have continued to promote the new LG Inform to councils and to work with the sector to explore the potential for local and national benchmarking. Good progress has been made with LG Inform Plus (formerly known as esd-toolkit), our subscription package for local authorities offering a range of additional data tools and access to ward-level data.

The future

13. We will focus on the further development of the sector’s approach to improvement in the light of the findings of the evaluation and policy thinking in the run up to the next general election and we will work with other LGA Boards to implement the results of the recent LGA Governance review.



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