

LGA Improvement Activity 2020/21

Purpose of report

For information.

Summary

The LGA culture, tourism and sport team have been running improvement activity for both officers and councillors, through existing partnerships with Sport England and Arts Council England (ACE) for a number of years.

Contracts have now been awarded from both Sport England and ACE to deliver a series of virtual online improvement activity between September 2020 and March 2021. This report updates members about the plans for improvement activity which is scheduled to take place across both contracts.

Recommendation

That the Board note the report.

Action/s

Officers will work with Sport England and Arts Council England to co-design and deliver Improvement activity until March 2021.

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LGA Improvement Activity 2020/21

Background

1. In partnership with Sport England and Arts Council England (ACE), the LGA has been delivering improvement activity to support the professional development and leadership skills of both officers and councillors for a number of years, through its flagship Leadership Essentials programme
2. Throughout the crisis, Sport England has continued to fund the LGA to deliver online improvement activity for officer alumni of the flagship Leadership Essentials programme, with a total of 22 events taking place between April and September. The purpose was to identify the challenges of COVID-19, learn from delegates about what they were experiencing, whilst developing leadership skills to act as leaders of place.
3. The challenges and responses discussed are being built into a new refreshed LGA/Sport England programme to gear up a new Leadership Essentials officer cohort to be able to deal with these issues.
4. During COVID-19, our regular work with ACE has been paused during the lockdown period as ACE repurposed all available funding to their emergency response package. However, they have since made available £40,000 in recognition of the value of the LGA's improvement work with local government.
5. In partnership with ACE, the LGA is keen to provide support to its member councils by developing the knowledge and skills of both councillors and officers to champion cultural activity in their local areas during a period of recovery, when leadership is needed most. This funding will be used to deliver improvement activity until March 2021.
6. Due to current Government regulations and guidelines, all improvement activity across both Sport England and ACE contracts are scheduled to take place virtually between September 2020 and March 2021.

Issues

Sport and physical activity:

7. Through engagement with officers, Sport England and the LGA have identified a series of key challenges facing the sport and leisure sector. In brief these include:

- 7.1. The extent to which entrenched health inequalities affect communities from more deprived backgrounds and BAME groups, and the impact social distancing will have for people with accessibility issues.
- 7.2. A new financial operating environment – lockdown measures have had and will continue to have a huge financial impact on leisure trusts; risking the closure of many leisure facilities. Councils are also facing unprecedented funding challenges as they face a financial gap of £11bn. The collapse of leisure trusts will result in councils having to bring services back in house under crisis conditions. The challenging financial situation facing councils also means they will have to make tough decisions about which services are prioritised going forward, which may lead to cuts to discretionary services.
- 7.3. There is an increased awareness and sentiment from the public and Government around the importance of exercise which has been backed by strong messages from the Government and a commitment to tackling obesity. This has created an opportunity to mainstream and embed sport and physical activity, and the contribution it plays to wider council service areas and corporate agendas. It is understood that doing so will change the perception of sport and physical activity and highlight its potential to deliver transformational change, and reframe its contribution to health inequalities, climate change, obesity, inactivity and burdens on health and social care.

Culture and libraries

8. The LGA, in partnership with ACE, have identified a series of needs within the culture and libraries sector. In brief, these include the fact that:
 - 8.1. Libraries have innovated rapidly in response to COVID-19 from the start of lockdown and continue to do so as many are in the process of reopening. It is important that the learning from this innovation is captured to support library services during a period of recovery.
 - 8.2. COVID-19 has highlighted the valuable role that libraries play in relation to a wide range of social outcomes, including public health, education, skills and economic renewal. However, the anticipated financial pressures on local authorities in a post COVID-19 world mean library services may face a challenging future in the next few years. It is therefore vital that councillors develop their skills and knowledge to articulate the significant contribution that library services make to communities and council objectives.

8.3. Due to the uncertainty that COVID-19 has presented to the future of library services, there is an identified need to support councils to reflect on their learning to date from managing the COVID-19 crisis and support their emerging planning for recovery and renewal. Providing support to councils to help them refine their plans in a period of recovery and uncertainty is critical.

8.4. With COVID-19 presenting a series of challenges to the local cultural offer and leisure services, it is critical to re-engage alumni throughout a period of recovery to build their leadership skills to address particular local challenges, and to develop leadership strategies which enable them to be effective leaders of place.

Planned activity

Sport England

9. The LGA is currently in discussion with Sport England around plans for improvement activity, scheduled to take place from October. With a focus on supporting officers to navigate a COVID-19 context, the programme has been re-shaped to explore a number of key challenges surrounding health inequalities, financial uncertainty, leisure facilities, whilst also exploring the opportunities COVID-19 has created to embed sport and physical activity in wider council service areas and corporate agendas (climate change, obesity, inactivity, burdens on health and social care).

10. The aim of the programme will be divided into three key stages of the leadership journey:

10.1. Understanding context

10.2. Developing collaborative leadership skills and behaviours to work in a COVID-19 context

10.3. Building knowledge and skills to influence and change the system to positively change lives

11. The programme will consist of up to five sessions. Each of the five sessions will be delivered virtually across a two week period.

Arts Council England: 2020/21

12. The LGA have been awarded a grant of £40,000 to deliver a series of online activity between September 2020 and March 2021.

13. Based on discussions with ACE, £30,000 has been allocated to libraries and £10,000 allocated to culture.

14. The overall aim of the programme is to support both officers and councillors to learn from the challenges of COVID-19, and support delegates to think through how innovation can be applied to the upcoming period of recovery.
15. The programme has been shaped as follows:
 - 15.1.2 x library best practice seminars (September 2020)
 - 15.2.3 x library advocacy workshops (October – December 2020)
 - 15.3.3 x library recovery and renewal panels (January – March 2021)
 - 15.4.4 x leadership essentials (October 2020 – January 2021)
16. As part of the 2019/20 contract, two councils (Oxfordshire and Nottinghamshire) were scheduled to have peer challenges during Spring/Summer 2020, which are currently on hold due to COVID-19 pandemic. These councils are:
 - 16.1. Nottinghamshire - Library Peer Challenge – March 2020
 - 16.2. Oxfordshire – Culture Peer Challenge – June 2020
 - 16.3. The LGA have offered to resume the conversation with Nottinghamshire and Oxfordshire about their planned peer challenges, and offer them the option of a remote peer challenge.

Financial Implications

17. The next phase of sport and physical activity improvement activity is expected to cost £105,000, funded by Sport England, against the contract's total value of £263,550.
18. Activity for libraries and culture is totalling a cost of £40,000 through a grant fund awarded by ACE.

Next steps

19. The LGA are set to deliver a programme of online activity from October onwards to support officers and councillors working within the culture and sport sectors until March 2021.

20. Looking forward, it would be helpful to understand from board members what knowledge and skills councillors will require to better support them through a period of recovery and renewal so this can be fed into discussions and developments with Sport England.

21. Work needs to be done to address the underrepresentation of BAME communities in leadership positions in both the culture and sport sector. Both programme areas will need to build this into their design, communication and delivery moving forward.