

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

Sector-led Improvement

1. Following the COVID-19 outbreak earlier this year, our [Sector-led Improvement \(SLI\) offer was rapidly refocused](#) to provide councils with support to address COVID-19 and associated challenges. As councils begin to look to a future beyond COVID-19, recovery and renewal related issues have risen as a core priority. We have created dedicated programmes of support in response, including [Recovery and Renewal panels](#), among other forms of remote support. In these ways and more, SLI continues to prove a responsive and flexible offer and remains in a strong position to respond and adapt to councils' needs as circumstances evolve.
2. During the first half of the year, the Improvement and Innovation Board commissioned Shared Intelligence to perform an [independent review of the Sector-led Improvement \(SLI\) programme](#). This review, performed by Shared Intelligence, confirmed that the prevailing majority of councils regard SLI as the right approach.
3. The review also highlighted 'that the annual basis of the MoU between MCHLG and the LGA drives a short-term focus constraining both the impact of SLI and the sector's ability to evidence that impact'. Given this, the LGA has begun to prepare a longer term SLI offer to cover a three, rather than one-year term, which would cover the entire period of the spending review.
4. The LGA has performed a series of engagements with the sector, to ask councils what support they would like included as part of the SLI offer over the next three years. Feedback has been gathered via general engagement channels and a [short webform](#) added to the LGA website. We also held two webinars on 'Shaping the Future Sector-led Improvement Offer', involving one session for Chief Executives (and Senior Managers) and another for Members, which I had the pleasure of chairing.

Redmond review

5. Sir Tony Redmond's [review of local audit and financial reporting](#) was published last month and on 7 October Sir Tony took part in an LGA webinar, attended by over 120 delegates, where he explained his findings. Sir Tony's report is now with the Government for its consideration and formal response.
6. Local audit was reformed in the 2014 Local Audit & Accountability Act. It came into full effect last year when a new round of audit contracts started, mainly procured through the national arrangement which the LGA lobbied for during the passage of the Bill, setting up PSAA Ltd to perform the role. Without this framework every council would need to procure its own audit.

7. Sir Tony has supported a joined-up approach in his findings. Other recommendations include that MHCLG set up a liaison committee of key stakeholders and for the deadline for final accounts to be audited to be delayed until the end of September (July is the current deadline), both of which the LGA called for. He also recommended that local government accounts need to be easier for all to follow.
8. We at the LGA are less convinced that creating a new body responsible for audit procurement and regulation is the answer. The fundamental issue with local audit is a basic lack of capacity in the audit market – in terms of the number of firms taking part and the number of auditors with appropriate qualifications employed by those firms.
9. The above issue has been exacerbated by additional quality assurance requirements placed on auditors as a result of high-profile business failures in the private sector (this has got nothing to do with local audit but has required our auditors to do extra work). This was the single largest contributor to the widespread audit delays that were experienced last year.

Climate change

10. On 11 September we launched the LGA and Local Partnerships' [Greenhouse gas accounting tool](#), which produces data to enable councils to understand their most significant sources of emissions. The tool is free to use for all councils in England and is supported by this [set of FAQs](#). This launch took place as part of webinar, chaired by Councillor Andrew Cooper, which covered the importance of carbon accounting, how the tool can be used and how it connects with the LGA's [LGIinform](#). The webinar and presentations from this session are [available on the LGA website](#).
11. Councils wanting to learn how their emissions compare to other councils can join our benchmarking exercise. To partake, councils should use the greenhouse gas accounting tool and email their completed baseline to ghgaccounting@local.gov.uk by 31 October 2020.
12. On 18 September, Councillor Liz Green chaired a two part webinar to launch the LGA's publication [10 questions to ask if you are scrutinising climate change](#). This webinar included a presentation from Councillor Clyde Loakes, Environment Portfolio Holder at London Borough of Waltham Forest and Deputy Chair, LGA's Environment Board, who spoke on declaring climate emergencies and the role of elected members in providing leadership in this area. Presentations are on [the LGA website](#); as is a [blog](#), which captures key themes and advice from the discussion.
13. Another webinar event, [Locking In Green Behaviours and the Co-benefits of Green Recovery](#), was held on 2 October and attended by over 150 delegates. This event considered emergent positive 'green' behaviours and how to harness and ingrain these as part of our everyday life. This event was chaired by

Councillor Neil Prior, organised jointly with the Welsh LGA and drew on work from [The Centre for Climate and Social Transformations \(CAST\)](#). The numbers at this event signal that many councils are looking to encourage green behaviours resulting since the COVID-19 outbreak. Presentations from the session can be viewed on [the LGA website](#) and there is a [blog](#) to summarise key themes.

Commercialisation

14. The Productivity team has piloted a range of support targeted to councils refocusing commercial activity within the current financial climate. As part of this work, I chaired a session on 13 October, entitled [What does the future of commercial activity look like post COVID-19?](#)
15. Other commercialisation support activity currently taking place includes commercial surgery panels, round tables on the future of schools traded services and on local authority trading companies.

Digital

16. Councillor Prior represented the LGA at Digital Catapult's webinar launch for a programme involving work with local authorities in support of the development of Internet of Things (IoT) applications to aid COVID-19 recovery. He was able to provide a national and councillor perspective on this topic, which provided attendees and the panel an understanding of how COVID-19 has applied further pressure to councils in this area.
17. Over the summer, Cllr Prior and I both chaired webinars for LGA on digital innovation and remote council meetings and we will both be speaking at the LGA Digital Showcase next month.
18. I am also scheduled to present at the Westminster Insight Forum on 5 November, where I will discuss how councils can embrace channel shift during COVID-19, using examples of how the LGA has supported councils through our various programmes.

Leadership Support

19. Since the last report, a further three pre-recorded [Leadership webinars](#) have been launched. I, along with Councillor David Renard and Councillor Sharma Tatler, took part in the first of these, on the Effective Chairing of Remote Meetings. The next webinar covered Presentation Skills on virtual platforms (focusing on remote interviews and meetings) and is hosted by Darren Caveney, creator of Comms2point0. The third session was on Coalition Administrations and delivered by Dr Stephanie Snape, a local government specialist and LGA Associate. This webinar identifies how to foster robust, stable coalition working during COVID-19 and beyond.

20. The Leadership team have also hosted two live webinars. In August, a live session on Rapid Innovation was co-chaired by Councillor Green and Councillor Bryony Rudkin. This webinar, a follow-up [to this pre-recorded webinar](#), explores leadership of rapid innovation and change during COVID-19. Our second live webinar was on the topic of Diversity and Inclusion relating to BAME groups and was hosted by Dr Kul Verma, Director of Deep Insight, and co-chaired by Councillor Sharon Taylor.
21. Our one-to-one coaching offer continues to be taken up by Members in leadership positions, including 65 senior Councillors at last count.
22. I am also pleased to let you know that, guidance permitting, Leadership Academy and some Leadership Essentials, will soon recommence at Warwick Conference Centre. Warwick is classified as a training venue and therefore exempt from the current 'Conference' government regulations and Rule of Six. Risk assessments have been carried out to ensure they are a COVID secure venue.
23. To ensure that councillors from across the country have equal access to our political leadership programmes, we have written to all Members and offered the option to attend programmes face to face or remotely. Hybrid delivery will also be trialled for some programmes so councillors can still be 'present' if unable to attend in person.

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. [Design in the Public Sector programme applications open](#): announcing the launch of this year's programme, which will focus on helping councils to explore their most pressing climate challenges.
 - 24.2. [LGA launches Return to Work campaigns to support professionals back into work](#): focusing on ICT, planning and legal – to help provide skilled professionals with free training or resources.
 - 24.3. [LGA Behavioural Insights applications now open](#): now in its sixth year, applications for this programme have opened with councils able to receive £20,000 to deliver projects aimed at changing, or sustaining behaviour.
 - 24.4. [LGA Digital Connectivity applications now open](#): this programme will help councils better meet the needs of their residents, improve productivity and their livelihoods through connectivity innovation
25. I have also written two articles for First. One, [Spotlight on our councils](#), which reflected on our [Learning Through Crisis](#) event at the LGA conference, which focused on some of the great work carried out by councils during COVID-19 and making that knowledge stick. The other, [Reflecting on recovery on renewal](#), provides an introduction into some of the support we are providing in this area, including the aforementioned Recovery and Renewal panels.

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26. Cllr Green commented on the launch of the [Net Zero Innovation programme](#), which councils and universities can apply to to address climate challenges at a local level.
27. In September, Cllr Prior wrote an [article in First](#), which highlighted the cyber threat to Local Government and stressed that threat to councils has increased. The article also provides some key recommendations for how councils can enhance their security and help to reduce the risk and impact of a cyber-attack.
28. Cllr Prior also co-produced a First article for the launch of the [Digital Connectivity Programme](#). This article set the context for the programme and why this should be an area of critical interest for councils and encourages councils to apply.

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