

Update on Remote Peer Support and Rough Sleeping Peer Support

Purpose of report

For information.

Summary

This report sets out progress of the LGA's Remote Peer Support (RPS) offer including Recovery and Renewal Panels and the development of a new Remote Corporate Health Check (RCHC). It also provides details of MHCLG/LGA's Rough Sleeping Peer Support offer.

Recommendations

That members note the work to date and future plans for:

- Remote Peer Support including Recovery and Renewal Panels and the Remote Corporate Health Check
- Rough Sleeping Peer Support (Delivery and Impact Panels)

Actions

Officers to progress this work in light of members' comments.

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Delivering Remote Peer Support and Rough Sleeping Peer Support

Background

1. This report provides an update on two distinct but related programmes of work:
 - Remote Peer Support including Recovery and Renewal Panels and the Remote Corporate Health Check
 - Rough Sleeping Peer Support (Delivery and Impact Panels)

Remote Peer Support

2. The LGA rapidly refocused its peer challenge and support offer to respond to COVID-19. A new Remote Peer Support (RPS) offer was launched in July 2020. It provides councils with support and challenge in addressing both COVID-19 related issues and broader challenges. To date, there have been two distinct RPS options available to councils.
 - **Recovery and Renewal Panel**
 - **Bespoke Remote Peer Support**
3. Recovery and Renewal Panels are focused around an online workshop facilitated by the LGA and typically supported by a Chief Executive and Leader peer. They provide an opportunity for councils to reflect on the learning from their COVID-19 response as well as consider plans for recovery and renewal.
4. Bespoke Remote Peer Support (BRPS) provides a longer process for councils to focus on a specific issue or service area in greater depth. Each participating council receives independent challenge and support from a team of senior officer and member peers. 'Remote onsite' activity – including 1-1 discussions and focus groups – takes place over a number of days followed by detailed written feedback. BRPS has already considered successfully a broad range of issues such as governance, transformation and tourism.
5. Remote Peer Support has enabled councils to learn and support each other during a very challenging period. An initial stocktake of the Remote Peer Support offer is attached at **appendix 1**. This is an interim assessment based on less than five months of activity – a fuller evaluation will be undertaken at a later stage.

Participation and feedback to date

6. There has been good take-up of RPS from the sector. The LGA has already delivered **51** programmes of RPS work (to 47 councils) since July and RPS work is planned with **39** councils before the end of March 2021. In total, more than **90** councils have been involved in the Remote Peer Support programme to date – either by receiving support or providing a peer. Following RPS, the LGA is able to provide additional support and guidance to councils to address identified challenges, via its [Principal Advisers](#) and through its wider improvement offer.

7. To date, 15 councils have received a Recovery and Renewal Panel and a further 16 Panels are planned to take place before 31 March 2021. Panels have typically focused on a council's COVID-19 response and plans for recovery. In addition, 36 programmes of Bespoke RPS have been delivered (for 34 councils) with a further 23 planned for the remainder of 2020/21. Four councils have received both a Panel and BRPS. Councils have used Bespoke RPS to support activity in a wide range of areas including equality and diversity, planning and communications. These figures do not include the wider LGA remote activity relating to adult and children's services.
8. Feedback to date from participating councils and has been very positive. Councils that receive remote peer support are asked to complete a voluntary survey. The headline findings to date include:
 - 100% of respondents were satisfied with the remote peer support received
 - 82% were very satisfied
 - 18% were fairly satisfied

“In an incredibly busy time the Recovery and Renewal Panel was a real chance to stop and reflect. The structure helped us be clearer about some of our weaknesses & the feedback enabled us to be more confident in our strengths.”

9. An important element of the Remote Peer Support offer is the value and reciprocal learning it provides to participating [peers](#) as well the councils receiving the support. **68 peers** from 51 councils have taken part in providing remote peer support to date.

“Given the fast-moving nature of the pandemic, with little time to reflect, spending time looking at how others were responding was very useful.”

Survey feedback to date indicated that all peers have been satisfied with their experience of being part of an RPS team.

Impacts and learning from councils

10. Remote Peer Support is designed to reflect local needs and circumstances. A peer team's challenge, reflections and recommendations are developed to support the participating council. However, as with other peer-based activity there is learning both for the peers involved and the sector more broadly – key emerging themes from the work undertaken to date are detailed in the interim stocktake and are summarised below:
 - Councils are wishing to build upon the significant achievements of their COVID-19 responses
 - Councils are continuing to concurrently manage COVID-19 response activity, recovery and renewal planning, and addressing wider issues – including those that pre-dated the pandemic – within a more challenging context

- Many councils are now developing new corporate and financial plans informed by their initial response and recovery framework – however, iterative and adaptive planning approaches are likely to continue
- The importance of sustainable national funding for councils as well as local flexibilities in key areas
- Councils participating in RPS have provided a range of good and emerging practice which has been shared

Impacts and learning from the RPS process

11. Remote Peer Support is underpinned by the existing principles of [sector led improvement](#), including that councils are responsible for their own performance. The overall framework of RPS, including the core themes and questions, are an adaptation of the corporate peer challenge (CPC) model – but with additions and revisions to prompt thinking about the impact and significance of COVID-19. Within the overall framework, the specific scope and questions used in a council’s RPS work have been bespoke – informed by the views of the participating council, peer team and the LGA. This approach has worked well – providing some structure and consistency across councils but also allowing work to be tailored to local needs.
12. The experience of delivering RPS also provides broader learning for the LGA’s improvement offer. For example, virtual support work can be undertaken by peers without the need for travel. This has served to broaden the peer pool – including geographically and for those with caring responsibilities. Officers continue to seek to ensure that there is a diversity of peers used for our remote peer support offer.
13. In response to interest from the sector, the LGA will shortly launch an additional RPS option – the Remote Corporate Health Check (RCHC). A RCHC is a framework for councils to focus on key corporate issues, such as priority setting, place leadership and financial planning. A RCHC provides more time and space than a Recovery and Renewal Panel to consider key corporate challenges and recovery issues.
14. Remote Peer Support, including a RCHC, will not seek to replicate the comprehensive scope, focus and in-depth analysis achieved as part of a Corporate Peer Challenge. This is a deliberate decision: when the LGA first piloted a remote offer in July 2020, it was determined that onsite activity is a requirement of a CPC. Feedback from participating councils and peers has been very positive about remote peer support, but there are clearly mixed views about the potential for remote activity to completely replace onsite work.

“I think there is a lot of merit in using remote peer support as part of a blended offer in future. I would see remote engagement as a real value-added opportunity rather than replacing the traditional model.”

15. The LGA intends for onsite peer challenge to resume in 2021 and it is recommended that the requirement for some onsite activity as part of a Corporate Peer Challenge is maintained. Central to the value of a CPC is its ability to understand a council's culture – including through observing norms and behaviours – and face to face activity is required to support this. However, there are clear opportunities and advantages from more blended (remote and onsite) approaches when the LGA's CPC programme recommences in 2021.

Rough Sleeping Peer Support

Context

16. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, councils and their partners, backed by government support and funding, have worked tirelessly to support rough sleepers in their areas. In September 2020, over 29,000 vulnerable individuals had been supported, with over 10,000 in emergency accommodation and nearly 19,000 provided with settled accommodation or move on support.
17. Work is ongoing to ensure as few of these individuals return to the streets as possible including the £266m Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP), which incorporates funding to bring forward 3,300 new homes for rough sleepers this year. To support this work, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) have worked jointly with the LGA to develop and facilitate a peer support offer to assist councils in the next stage of their response.
18. As part of the Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP) process, MHCLG have an expectation that all successful councils will engage in a peer support process. However, the Rough Sleeping Peer Support offer is available to all councils to support their rough sleeping response including those councils who are not in receipt of NSAP funding.
19. The Rough Sleeping Peer Support offer is designed to provide a safe space, framework and process for council lead officers to come together, reflect on their work to date, share and challenge learning and highlight good practice across the sector. It is a mechanism to provide councils with information that allows them to learn from others and to challenge their own delivery.

The LGA's Rough Sleeping Peer Support offer - Delivery and Impact Panels

20. The LGA are working with MHCLG to facilitate a programme of dynamic and inclusive 'Delivery & Impact Panels' for participating councils. The development of the programme has been directly informed by the successful experience of Remote Peer Support to date.

21. Subject to all NSAP councils participating in the programme, it is anticipated that the LGA will deliver twenty-five panels nationally. However, as the offer of peer support is open to all councils (i.e. not just those receiving NSAP funding) this could potentially increase to thirty-five panels nationally - although it is recognised that not all councils will want to participate.
22. Central to the Rough Sleeping Peer Support offer is a two-and-a-half-hour on-line 'Delivery and Impact Panel' facilitated by the LGA which aims to provide the space and time for council lead officers to come together, share and reflect upon their work to date and consider and test their planning. The panel discussions will provide a structured conversation to explore and stretch current thinking and an opportunity to share good practice and learning across the sector to help inform the 'rough sleeping' response.
23. Delivery and Impact Panels are based on the LGA's existing Sector Led Improvement (SLI) principles, providing a constructive process with the central aim of helping councils to improve. It is not an assurance mechanism and will be undertaken from the viewpoint of a critical friend, allowing participants to learn from others and challenge their own delivery to ensure it is efficient, effective and robust.
24. Officers continue to seek to ensure that there is a diversity of peers used for our remote peer support offer. It is well documented that rough sleepers generally have poorer health outcomes than the general population and that disabled people, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities and mental health problems, are over-represented in rough sleepers. Although not a protected characteristic, many rough sleepers have substance misuse problems and may have undiagnosed psychosis and face other physical and psychological barriers to accessing support services.
25. Following the completion of each Delivery and Impact Panel, the LGA will provide a summary write-up including strengths, details of good practice, emerging issues and gaps which can help councils with their ongoing response. The LGA will also produce a national report detailing key themes and emerging learning from the Delivery and Impact Panels. This final report will provide an evidence base which the sector can utilise more widely.

Engagement with the sector

26. In the context of the current pandemic and demands on councils, the aim is to ensure the timing of the panels work for councils and that time spent in preparation is minimal and proportionate. The LGA have consulted sector representatives via the LGA's Homelessness Policy Officer Network to help shape proposals.
27. On 01 December 2020 the LGA co-hosted a webinar with MHCLG, chaired by Catherine Bennion, Deputy Director of the Rough Sleeping Covid-19 Response Team, to launch the offer and seek views from sector representatives. Participants heard directly from Kelly Tolhurst MP, Minister for Rough Sleeping and Housing; Councillor James

Jamieson, LGA Chairman; and colleagues from the sector about the efforts of councils to support rough sleepers as well as how the LGA's Rough Sleeping Peer Support offer can help inform the next stage of their response. The Webinar was attended by 247 participants and included a Zoom poll to engage participants to help shape the Rough Sleeping Peer Support offer.

28. Following the Webinar, the LGA wrote to councils to seek expressions of interest in participating in the first Delivery and Impact Panels during December 2020. These early panel meetings will be used to test and shape the offer before it is rolled out from January 2021. The response has been extremely positive allowing the LGA to host 3 Delivery and Impact Panels in December involving twenty-four councils. The full programme will begin in January 2021.

29. Building on this approach and to ensure the voice of councillors are heard, the LGA is planning to host additional learning events targeted at housing portfolio holders next year. These events will facilitate the sharing of learning and experiences from those leading the rough sleeping response within their respective councils. Alongside the Delivery and Impact Panels, the key themes and emerging learning from these events will be used to inform a national report by the end of March 2021. This final report will:

- Capture the strengths and challenges from councils' response to Rough Sleeping
- Identify good practice in local planning and delivery arrangements
- Highlight key issues and learning with the potential to inform national policy development

The national report will be shared with MHCLG and participating councils.

Implications for Wales

30. There are no direct implications for Wales from either programme.

Financial Implications

31. There are no direct financial implications – delivery of Remote Peer Support and the Rough Sleeping Peer Support offer (Delivery and Impact Panels) will be met from existing budgets.

Next steps

Remote Peer Support

32. Members are asked to continue to note the progress and future plans for Remote Peer Support.

Rough Sleeping Peer Support (Delivery and Impact Panels)

33. Members are asked to note the proposed plans for the LGA's Rough Sleeping Peer Support offer.