

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

### **Sector-led Improvement**

1. In light of COVID-19 and recent national lockdown measures, we continue to provide a wide range of remote support to councils, including [Recovery & Renewal Panels and Bespoke Remote Peer Support](#), to assist councils with their immediate responses to COVID-19 and plans for recovery and renewal. Our Peer Support Offer includes a new interim virtual support offer, the [Remote Corporate Health Check](#), which provides an opportunity for councils to focus on key corporate issues—such as priority setting, place leadership and financial planning—over a period of days.
2. We are reviewing the resumption of Corporate Peer Challenge and other peer support offers that require on-site face to face activity. We are applying the learning from the recent evaluation and from the experience and benefits of delivering peer support remotely. We intend to recommence during the next financial year.

### **Housing and Homelessness**

3. In November, we launched the [Housing Advisors Programme](#), which provides bespoke expert support to councils – or groups of councils – wanting to transform the delivery of homes and places, the quality and security of existing homes and/or to prevent and reduce homelessness. This will help to make a significant difference to the housing crisis and help to build capacity in councils by ensuring the sustainability of projects in the longer term. We will also take the opportunity of sharing learning from these projects to ensure that the wider sector can benefit from knowledge generated through this programme.
4. We are also delivering the Peer Support programme for the Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP). There is an expectation that all successful councils will engage in a peer support process, delivered through our [Rough Sleeping Peer Support offer](#). This involves Delivery and Impact Panels, which offer councils 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. The programme was officially launched on 1 December by the LGA Chairman and the Minister for Housing and Rough Sleeping.

### **Economic growth and Income generation**

5. We have launched an [Economic Growth Support Hub](#) to support councils in their role of helping economies renew and recover. The hub provides councils with a range of resources across all aspects of their economic development plans. Our Economic Growth Advisors Programme is also looking to engage councillors this year.

6. On October 13, I chaired the Zoom conference [What will the future of commercial activity look like post COVID-19](#), attended by 179 officers and councillors. The conference was part of our targeted support offer to councils refocusing commercial activity impacted by COVID-19 and changes to investment guidance by central government and CIPFA. The conference featured experts from the University of Oxford and London Business School, who presented new ideas about purposeful commercial investments and their social impact. It also included practical commercial surgeries hosted by local government officers and selected commercial experts, answering questions on commercial business planning, financial modelling and legal powers, plus a closing expert panel discussion.

### **Procurement and Commissioning**

7. Embedding social value in contracts is a way to support communities and make resources go further, while still maintaining the quality and breadth of services. Our Procurement team worked with the Social Value Taskforce, a subset of our National Advisory Group for procurement, to develop a [social value statement template](#) for councils to use to set out their key messages and Social Value commitments.

### **Digital**

8. Councillor Prior and I represented the LGA at BrightTalk's webinar on [Local Government Transformation: How Councils are driving Digital Outcomes](#), where we considered the impact of modernising IT systems and the implications of that transformation at Pembrokeshire and Sevenoaks councils respectively.
9. In November, Councillor Prior and I also chaired and facilitated the annual [LGA Digital Showcase on digital innovation](#), inclusion and transformation. This event involved workshops led by Shropshire County Council, Norwich City Council, Huntingdonshire District Council, Norfolk County Council, Worcestershire County Council and Southwark Council; speakers from MHLCG and was attended by 140+ delegates.
10. I presented at the Westminster Insight Forum, where I discussed how the LGA has supported councils to conduct channel shifts within their organisations and encouraged councils to embrace present opportunities to do the same.
11. I chaired a webinar on the future of remote and hybrid council meetings in this environment where national and local restrictions are fluctuating. This session involved discussion with sector experts and council representatives and was attended by more than 200 delegates.
12. In December, I launched the [Digital Connectivity Programme](#), which has awarded funding to seven councils with the projects looking to deliver sustainable rural

connectivity mapping, toolkits for tackling urban not-spots and initiatives for targeted take up of local connectivity offers.

13. I also launched the case study series for the Digital Housing Programme with a [recorded introductory video](#). The programme has projected resource and non-financial savings of over £430k across four councils.

### **Research and Data**

14. We launched a predicative analytics programme to support the increasing use of predictive analytics within councils. This includes a [guide to using predictive analytics in local public services](#), which draws together contributions from councils and national organisations with policy and technical expertise, and a [practitioners' network for local government](#), to provide an interactive space where councils can share learning and support in this rapidly evolving area.

### **Leadership**

15. We launched two new [Leadership webinars](#): one on **presentation skills** and another on **coalition administrations**. We also launched a new **module on leading mentally healthier communities** and a new [Leadership Essentials Childrens Services Alumni Event](#) for experienced lead members.
16. Councillor Kelham Cooke and Councillor Wayne Davies took part in an NGDP 'Working with politicians' session on 15 December and 17 December respectively. This session gave participants a chance to hear from councillors about their lives and their political motivations, as well as providing a chance to explore and better understand the expectations councillors have of officers.

### **Equalities, diversity and inclusion**

17. In response to feedback we are developing a more comprehensive programme of support to equalities, diversity and inclusion. This support offer will include the development of a central hub, where councils can easily navigate to the range of equalities, diversity and inclusion tools and resources available.

### **Climate Change**

18. In October we held a webinar on [Locking in positive behaviours and co-benefits of green recovery](#). Chaired by Councillor Neil Prior, Cabinet Member for Transformation and IT, Pembrokeshire County Council and Deputy Chair of the LGA's Improvement and Innovation Board, this online event was attended by 150 people and covered how local government can continue to embed the behaviours we have seen as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to climate action. 82 per cent of attendees were very satisfied and the remaining 18 per cent were fairly satisfied with the event and the [blog post](#) and the [slides](#) are available on the LGA website.

19. On 11 December we held a another webinar, [Seeing the Wood for the Trees](#), which explored the case for planting trees in terms of finance and carbon, the challenges this presents for local authorities and the benefits of urban tree planting. This event was chaired by Councillor Mike Haines, Leader of the Independent Group at Teignbridge District Council and included speakers from Cornwall County Council, the City of Wolverhampton Council, the Forestry Commission, the Woodland Trust and Local Partnerships. The event was attended by 170 people.

### **Press and external communications**

20. Since the last Forum, I have commented on the following LGA press releases and external communications on behalf of the Board:
- [A press release to announce the opening of the LGA's Digital Connectivity Programme](#), which is helping councils to provide vital services for residents who do not have access or confidence to use digital platforms
  - [A press release announcing funding for seven councils](#) under the Digital Connectivity Programme
  - [A press release promoting the second #CouncilsCan Day](#) highlighting the work of local government during the pandemic
  - [The Local Government Third Party Spend 2019/20 Almanac](#), published by EY and Oxygen Finance. The Almanac brings together a view of expenditure across local government in England and provides a look into the spending behaviours of councils over the previous three financial years.
21. I contributed to a [piece in the New Statesman](#), which looks at how the pandemic has affected cyber security in different sectors. This article highlighted that cyber threats have not gone away and that the risk associated with a cyber incident is greater than ever. The work of councils has never been so vital to the most vulnerable in our society, and the digital communications and services that they use have never been so critical to our efforts.
22. I also wrote an article for *first magazine for councillors*, [Making it count](#), about the importance of the Census and councillors' role in making it a success.

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