

SECTOR-LED IMPROVEMENT IN 2020/21

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Introduction

Programme background

The LGA's sector-led improvement (SLI) programme for 2020/21 encompassed a broad range of programmes based on what we have learnt works for improvement: a strong, representative political and managerial leadership and workforce, support and challenge from one's peers, the ability to benchmark performance against others, using of comparable data and the sharing of good practice.

The outbreak of COVID-19 meant that the offer was rapidly refocused to provide councils with vital support to address new and enhanced challenges brought by the pandemic. This included dedicated ongoing regional support, peer support and intelligence gathering in relation to COVID-19, provided through principal advisors, regional teams and political group offices – and a wide range of new online tools and support to address key issues impacting all councils.

This report provides an overview and summary of highlights from the 2020/21 support programme.

Highlights

- We provided **300 remote based peer improvement programmes to 250 councils** (almost three quarters of all English councils), including to assist with COVID-19, recovery and renewal and the rough sleeping response
- Our new **Rough Sleeping Peer Support offer was accessed by 222 councils** in receipt of Next Steps Accommodation Programme funding or other Rough Sleeping Funding
- More than **630 councillors received COVID-19 related development** through participation in member development programmes
- Attendance at LGA virtual events reached near **10,000 virtual visits**.
- **Hundreds of examples of council led good practice** were published on the LGA website, in particular, to support the COVID-19 response.
- During the height of the pandemic, we engaged with or provided support and information to **every council**
- We set up a **Remote Council Meetings Hub**, comprising a central pool of information, advice, and guidance from partners. This hub received more than 56, 000 views and was among the most popular pages on the LGA website
- We launched a **carbon accounting tool**, which has been **downloaded by near 200 councils** and endorsed by the Committee for Climate Change, whose role it is to advise and report on progress made on emissions targets and to the UK Parliament.

The report highlights that these resources and support have helped councils to lead throughout the COVID-19 crisis and transform their services in order to meet the needs of their communities. According to our most recent diagnostic report analysis, which assesses sector performance across different areas, **improvement has been seen across two thirds of indicators**. This is reflected by high levels of resident satisfaction in councils. Our February (2021) resident satisfaction survey showed that public trust in local government has remained high; with **more than 65 per cent of respondents reported trusting their local council either 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount'** – the third highest result since polling began in 2012. 80 per cent respondents reported their council had done 'very' or 'fairly well' in keeping services running as normal during the coronavirus pandemic.

It also shows that the SLI programme is not only effective but extremely good value. While the previous national framework had costs estimated in excess of £2 billion a year, with the total cost run SLI programmes in 2020/21 amounted £19.2 million in total. Our support offer, which is funded by UK Government, continues to provide excellent value for money for councils and the taxpayer.

The value of SLI is further underscored by the publication of an independent evaluation of the offer by Shared Intelligence, who were commissioned to carry out a review of the [SLI programme](#). This review confirmed that the vast majority of councils regard SLI as the right approach and that satisfaction with the offer remains high.

Programme approach

The SLI approach is grounded in the following core principles:

- councils are responsible for their own performance and improvement
- councils are primarily accountable to local communities
- councils have a collective responsibility for the performance of the sector as a whole
- the role of the LGA is to maintain an overview of performance of the sector and to provide tools and support.

In line with this framework, the LGA supports local government through the work of regional teams, which connect councils with our universal offers support alongside direct, tailored and bespoke support for those facing specific challenges. This approach ensures that all councils across England are engaged with our programme, with **all councils accessing at least 6 parts of the offer during the past three years** (while most councils have accessed 12 parts).

Programme access and delivery

Further details about our support offer are available via our [support hub](#). Local authorities can gain access to this programme of support via our team of regionally based Principal Advisers, who help connect the LGA and councils. Principal Advisers and regional teams provide a focal point for discussions with councils about their improvement needs and, in turn, relay the support that we can provide. The programme for 2020/21 provided support in the following areas:

- Supporting the COVID-19 response
- Supporting improvement through peer support
- Supporting councils to respond to homelessness and housing issues
- Supporting service specific areas and other developments
- Supporting financial resilience and procurement
- Supporting economic growth and recovery
- Supporting innovation and transformation
- Supporting research and benchmarking
- Supporting local government leadership
- Supporting the local government workforce
- Supporting effective communications
- Supporting the response to climate change

This report highlights key programme achievements and deliverables across each of these core areas during 2020-21.

Supporting the COVID-19 response

Following the onset of the pandemic in 2020, the LGA introduced a raft of support to help councils manage and respond to COVID-19 and related challenges. This included the development of a COVID-19 Response and Co-ordination programme (previously Testing, Contact Tracing and Outbreak Management) programme; support to respond to COVID-19 related queries and FAQs and the sharing of COVID-19 related practice; and training and other resources across areas to support the co-ordination of the COVID-19 response. A number of these support offers are addressed in the text below – others interlink with other support offers and so appear elsewhere in this report.

Highlights

- The coronavirus enquires service handled and responded to some **2,350 enquiries**, from **near 600 organisations, including 300 local authorities**
- We provided a COVID-19 case studies hub, which shared more than **150 examples of good council practice** and was viewed more than **56,000 times**
- The development of a **COVID-19 Response and Co-ordination programme** to support councils through the pandemic

COVID-19 enquiries, FAQs and good practice

The unprecedented nature of events in 2020 meant that councils had to learn and adapt in real-time to respond to COVID-19 and continue to govern and provide services effectively.

In March 2020, we established the coronavirus enquiries service for local government. The service ran until mid-July, at which point the number of enquiries had reduced sufficiently to return to usual means of communication. Its objective was to provide an advisory service in response to the unprecedented numbers of questions, impacts and procedural changes necessary because of the emergency health situation. During its time of operation, **the service handled and responded to some 2,350 enquiries**, involving the interaction of over 15,000 emails between correspondents and advising teams. We **received enquiries from around 600 organisations**, of which more than 300 were local authorities.

To support councils in finding answers to more common enquiries, we also established the FAQ hub, which **provided answers to over 150 questions across more than twenty FAQ topics** – spanning issues relating to business rates relief to social distancing measures to those associated with waste and recycling.

COVID-19 meant sharing of good practice also became more critical than ever in ensuring councils could learn from each other in responding to the associated challenges. Our SLI programme played a key role in collecting and disseminating these examples via the [COVID-19 good practice hub](#), which was established in the early weeks of the crisis and has since **shared more than 150 examples of COVID-19 related good practice**, covering a broad range of issues, including communications; adult social care; children, young people and education; cyber and digital solutions; emergency food provision; finances and economy; test, trace and outbreak management; financial and non-financial support to self-isolate, enforcement and compliance and supporting vulnerable residents. Highlighting the demand for these case studies, **the hub was viewed over 56,000 times** during the 2020/21 period.

Further good practice examples were shared via other knowledge-sharing pathways, including events, podcasts, webinars, action learning sets and Knowledge Hub groups. By sharing learning across this range of platforms, the LGA's support offer maximised learning opportunities across an even larger array of topics – helping councils manage and adapt to the continuing effects of the pandemic while informing plans for recovery and renewal.

COVID-19 response and co-ordination

There is not a single area of local government that has not been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 Response and Co-ordination programme aided councils during the pandemic through support relating to local contact tracing, community testing, surge testing, shielding, the clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) cohort, and vaccine take-up. We also provided ['Public health on the Frontline' commentary](#).

Cross-body working

Cross-body working remained an integral part of this work, involving co-ordination between government, council leaders and chief executives, local authorities to prepare for and manage local outbreak planning. Examples include:

- Involvement in the **Stakeholder Engagement Forum** on shielding, CEV and vulnerable people throughout the pandemic. This ensured councils remained a key part of the development of support for CEV and self-isolation; engaging in sub-groups with MHCLG, DEFRA and councils on data, local lockdowns and food supply and sharing local learning to inform future support needs and developments.
- Supporting discussions between councils and MHCLG/**Government Digital Service** to develop a minimum viable product for the new CEV/Shielding Support Framework and better data flows to and from councils
- Sharing insights and learning from regional chief executives with **Cross-Whitehall Local Authority Delivery Group** and MHCLG on moving through the roadmap, highlighting pressures and risks at each stage.
- Participation in the **Cross Whitehall Working Group for Assurance of COVID-19 Local Outbreak Management**, which positioned the LGA as a key part of the regional architecture for this body, with the remit of sharing insights, identifying council support needs.

Test, Trace and Outbreak Management

The LGA also delivered substantial work in the area of Test, Trace and Outbreak Management (TTOM). This included the establishment of a **Local Outbreak Control Plans Advisory Board**, which brought together expertise from across local government to support councils to manage outbreaks more effectively. The Board provided advice to ministers on local outbreak plans and arrangements and shared learning, good practice and information for local government. With near 30 meetings taking place during the year, this helped to support national arrangements and provide councils with capacity-building and knowledge-sharing opportunities.

Our **TTOM support programme** created further tools and resources to address and share leadership challenges, including dedicated sessions and top tips for chief executives and leaders. The programme delivered high quality, timely webinars for chief executives on the key COVID-19 issues, including vaccine and inequalities, vaccine roll-out, health inequalities, shielded groups, enforcement and revision of local outbreak management plans. The webinars attracted high council attendance and provided a critical space for chief executives to explore current topics and concerns with 'Contain' directors working with the NHS test and trace programme – for instance, around variants of concern, surge testing, coming out of lockdown and the roadmap and revised 'Contain' framework.

Vaccination programme support

We commissioned a support package for councils on behaviour change, specifically on vaccine uptake. This included a think piece to support councils to use **behavioural insights techniques to encourage the take-up of vaccine**; collation of useful resources and interviews with those using behavioural insights to encourage take-up; and top tips and guidance on the subject. This programme of work involved engaging with MHCLG's National Vaccine Deployment Group, including key input into the Data Task Group and supporting the Inequalities Steering Group, led by council chief executives, to ensure roll-out reaches all sections of the population and is equitable.

Supporting improvement through peer support

The peer-based offer is a cornerstone of the SLI offer, which has helped councils to develop their capabilities in leadership, governance, corporate capacity and in financial resilience for more than ten years. The offer provides councils with a unique opportunity to engage with peers with current or previous experience in the sector¹ and provide challenge, support and guidance on specific areas or issues. Including universal and bespoke packages of support, this offer has provided councils with vital support to respond to challenges relating to and exacerbated by COVID-19

Highlights

- We provided **300 remote based peer improvement programmes to 250 councils** (almost three quarters of all English councils), including to assist with COVID-19, recovery and renewal and the rough sleeping response
- High levels of satisfaction across new remote support offers (Recovery and Renewal Panels, Remote Corporate Health Checks, Remote Bespoke Peer Support).
- Placement of more than **180 peers from 91 councils**, across all regions.

Remote Peer Support

Following the onset of COVID-19 measures, we introduced a range of remote peer support options – ensuring that councils maintained continued access to peer support throughout the year. The following programmes were introduced as part of the [Remote Peer Support](#) offer:

- **Recovery and Renewal Panels**, which provide councils an opportunity to reflect on their response to COVID-19 through a remote panel discussion, involving an open and collaborative conversation about recovery and renewal plans, capturing and sharing learning about developing practice from across the sector.
- **Remote Corporate Health Checks (RCHCs)**, which offer a flexible framework and process for councils to focus on key corporate issues – such as priority setting, place leadership and financial planning – over a period of days. This offer was developed in response to sector identified needs and does not replace the flagship Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) programme (which will recommence in July 2021 if government guidance allows, given the importance of onsite engagement).
- **Remote Bespoke Peer Support**, which give councils the option to review a specific issue or set of issues in greater depth. This process involves a more detailed series of remote interviews and discussions with the council, and uses a similar approach to the traditional peer challenges, being delivered over 2-3 days.

Further remote peer-based support was delivered through our **Rough Sleeping Peer Support** programme (read further details under Housing and Homelessness).

Collectively, **250 councils benefited from these offers**, covering almost three-quarters of all English councils. Feedback from councils across the broad spectrum of these offers has been incredibly positive, as highlighted by the below reflections on recovery and renewal panels and results from satisfaction surveys.

¹ This includes individuals with practical knowledge and experience of working within local authorities or other relevant public bodies. Depending on the nature of the area seeking improvement or redress, this may include persons from the NHS, police or central government.

The Remote Peer Support programme also set out to be an opportunity for reciprocal learning, with peers gaining as much learning as the receiving councils. We have **placed over 180 peers from 91 councils – with 56% of officer peers being female.**

Remote Peer Support: Reflections

Telford and Wrekin, Recovery and Renewal Panel

Shaun Davies, Leader

“The process allowed us to stop and reflect and then to allow a mirror to be held up to us which was positive in itself, the panel itself were very useful to us to take our processes forward and of course provide that useful assurance where we thought we were doing a good job - we were and where we wanted to further develop - we could and gave us ideas of further development too.”

St Helens, Recovery and Renewal Panel

Kath O’Dwyer, Chief Executive

“The Recovery & Renewal Panel was a great opportunity for us to take a little time out to reflect on our learning from the response phase and obtain an external view on our reset and recovery plans - a really helpful process.”

South Staffordshire, Recovery and Renewal Panel

Cllr Brian Edwards, Leader

“This panel followed a Peer review and a report back held about two years ago and was very useful and rewarding so having met most of the members before was a great help in our understanding of each other and I personally found the experience very helpful for the future and challenges for South Staffordshire. I also look forward to a continuation of our work together and if we can be of help to any other council then we would be pleased to do so.”

Cheltenham, Recovery and Renewal Panel

Steve Jordan, Former Leader

“This was well timed to help take stock of our plans for recovery given everything the council has gone through.”

Cornwall FRS, Remote Bespoke Peer Support

Mark Hewitt, Interim Chief Fire Officer

“Our virtual peer review enabled a wider range of staff to engage with the process who in the past may not of had the time to travel to a location for a face to face meeting. The virtual approach did not detract from the process and was managed extremely well from the LGA peer review team.”

Warrington, Recovery and Renewal Panel

Steven Broomhead, Chief Executive

“Great opportunity to pause and reflect in a manic year. LGA panel got it right with the correct balance of challenge and support.”

Torbay, Remote Bespoke Peer Support

Steve Darling, Leader

“I found the Bespoke Remote Peer Support extremely useful when we had a change of circumstance at the local authority which meant we needed to review governance arrangements around an arm’s length company. The support was insightful, challenging and very helpful. We have been able to implement the vast majority of the recommendations and have higher levels of confidence around the governance arrangements for this important arm’s length company.”

Cheshire West and Chester, Recovery and Renewal Panel

Andrew Lewis, Chief Executive

“We found the process engaging, informative and proportionate. Even during periods of emergency response, it is useful to reflect and the panel session was very valuable to help shape our recovery and renewal plan.”

Remote Peer Support: Satisfaction

The following provides a breakdown of key responses from Council Chief Executives that have participated in Recovery and Renewal Panels and Remote Peer Support.

Recovery & Renewal Panels

- 87% of respondents were very satisfied with the Recovery and Renewal Panel.
- 100% of respondents felt the Recovery and Renewal Panel teams understood the issues and challenges facing their council.
- 53% of respondents stated that all their goals were achieved and the remaining 47% stated they were largely achieved.
- 87% of councils would very likely recommend a Recovery and Renewal Panel to another council.

Bespoke Remote Peer Support

- 80% of respondents were very satisfied with the Bespoke Remote Peer Support and 90% were very satisfied with the challenge they received.
- 80% of respondents felt the RPS teams understood the issues and challenges facing their council
- 70% of respondents stated that all their goals were achieved and the remaining 30% stated they were largely achieved.
- 80% of councils would very likely recommend Bespoke Remote Peer Support to another council.

Bespoke Peer Support and Wider Support

Bespoke support has been provided to a large number of councils and remained a focal point of our COVID-19 activity. Examples of the support has included the provision of support to a new leader who took on the role during the pandemic, mentoring of leaders and cabinet members, and secondments to authorities who required additional strategic capacity.

Principal Advisers and regional teams provided further ongoing support to councils to respond to COVID-19 through **extensive engagement in Chief Executive (CEX) meetings, one-to-one meetings and by answering queries**. We engaged with, supported or provided information to every council during the first quarter of the year and this level of activity was maintained throughout the year.

Supporting financial resilience and procurement

Council finances have remained under immense strain since the onset of COVID-19, which created new demand for a range of services, whilst limiting, for many councils, principal sources of income. The pandemic also created new complications for procurement, including new demands and new obstacles to traditional processes. LGA support has continued to provide local government with critical support in addressing these issues, featuring the support outlined below.

Highlights

- Finance associates (FISAs) provided **direct support to 55 councils** facing severe financial challenges
- Near **600 participants** (members and officers) participated in our commercial skills masterclasses
- The **procurement and commissioning programme** actively contributed to developing sustainable supplies of PPE for councils

Finance support

We have provided councils across the country with much-needed support to help mitigate the financial effects of the pandemic – principally through our [Finance Improvement and Sustainability \(FISA\) programme](#), which uses LGA advisers – all of them former local authority chief finance officers – whose role it is to provide advice and insight to councils facing financial challenges. With the number of councils facing financial challenges growing in light of the pandemic, FISAs provided **direct support to 55 councils, spanning all regions**, during 2020/21. The support FISAs provided during this period included helping councils to understand and monitor the impact of COVID-19 on their finances; supporting councils to identify options for seeking in-year savings and alternative funding strategies; financial planning for recovery and renewal; and support for individual CFOs in undertaking their duties.

We provided councils with further support in terms of their financial response to COVID-19 and associated issues by way of guidance, development pathways and opportunities to collaborate. This included access to **Leadership Essentials courses on finance**, a **finance roundtable for council chief executives** from challenged councils, and collaborative **finance panels**, which brought together small groups of councils to reflect on their responses to COVID-19.

We also supported councils in refocusing commercial activity impacted by COVID-19 through support, including **commercial skills masterclasses, which attracted almost 600 local government participants** during the financial year. These masterclasses supported officers in improving their skills in commercial thinking, commercial business planning, adapting commercial strategies, governance for commercial activity and understanding the financial health of commercial activity. The councillor masterclasses supported elected members to develop skills in commercial leadership and decision making. Following this training, officers and councillors reported feeling more confident to take appropriate decisions about commercial activity impacted by COVID-19 and informed of updated investment guidance from government. We also held a commercialisation conference via Zoom, which

focused on the future of commercial activity post-COVID-19 and attracted 200 attendees (officers and councillors).

Procurement and Commissioning Programme

The events of 2020/21 also resulted in increased demand for procurement related support, provided through our [Procurement and Commissioning Programme](#). The impact of COVID-19 on suppliers and procurements processes was significant and fluctuated at different points in the year. Access to current information was critical to enable strategic decision making in council procurement processes. Our weekly updates and bulletins ensured that procurement officers and commissioners remained updated information on key local government suppliers (share price, contracts awarded and news) as well as issues and developments relating to local government procurement and commissioning. Reflecting the demand for information, our **subscriber list grew to near 3,000**.

COVID-19 measures caused unprecedented disruption to supply chains while COVID-19 was the catalyst for heightened demand for, at times, limited resources – Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in particular. Through collaboration with MHCLG, Cabinet Office and other public bodies, our procurement team **played an active role in developing sustainable supplies of PPE for councils** and their partners; the procurement of which was essential to keep public services running. As part of this work, the LGA **co-ordinated regular meetings on PPE procurement, attended by councils, LG professional buying organisations, MHCLG, DHSC, Cabinet Office colleagues**. These meetings provided opportunities for networking and sharing good practice while helping to ensure that central government departments understood council needs. The LGA, supported by the National Advisory Group (NAG) on procurement, also **worked with central government to inform three Procurement Policy Notes (PPNs) and various additional guidance documents**, published and to address supply chain issues resulting from COVID-19, including increased flexibility and supplier relief.

NAG—comprising a group of senior local government procurement professionals—is convened by the LGA and lends expert knowledge to our procurement and commission programme. With Britain's departure from the EU also on the horizon, the group also engaged with MHCLG and Cabinet Office in relation to emerging procurement reform, including in the development of the **national procurement policy statement** and the **Green Paper on Transforming Public Procurement**, which was published in December. This paper proposes reforms to be made to the public procurement regime following the EU exit and bears implications for all English councils.

Our procurement and commissioning programme for 2021/22 also furthered social initiatives. We held a series of events relating to modern slavery and social value, including a **Modern Slavery in the Supply Chain webinar, attended by 250 attendees**; a practical deep dive, Modern Slavery in the Supply Chain, attended by 70 people; a session on modern slavery in the supply chain for the construction steering group; and a **Social Value Masterclass**, attended by 50. We also launched our [social value guidance and template](#), for councils to use to set out their key messages and Social Value commitments and **supported the (virtual) social value conference**, led by the National Social Value Task Force, which **attracted more than 2,300 attendees this year**. Since COVID-19, it has become clear that the need for social value is greater than ever – having a clear, committed social value statement supports councils to communicate this to their key stakeholders.

Supporting economic growth and recovery

With local economies also badly affected by COVID-19, the LGA has provided councils with a raft of support to mitigate the economic effects of the crisis. A feature of the 2020/21 economic offer was the newly launched **Economic Growth Advisors Programme**, which enabled participating councils to source **Economic Growth Advisors** to support local economic recovery and growth in the longer term. We also launched a new **Economic Growth Support Hub**, which provides councils with a central point to access the complete range of tools and resources provided through the LGA, covering employment, re-skilling, high streets, SME support, procurement and business retention. In 2020/21, this range of support included the following:

- **Supporting locally-led jobs and skills recovery:** We engaged with member authorities to inform views and policies relating to COVID-19, including with the Combined Authority Employment and Skills Network.
- **Business support:** We supported councils in the distribution of the Small Business Grants Fund (SBGF) and Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Business Grants Fund (RHLCGF) schemes, promoting the efforts of councils and raising issues relating to the schemes and interpretation of the Government guidance.
- **Town centres toolkit:** This toolkit was updated to reflect present challenges and national guidance, including guidance to help local authorities and place partnerships to develop COVID-19 recovery planning as part of wider revitalisation.
- **Webinars and roundtables:** On topics such as how councils save and gain jobs in their recovery, the impact of remote working on local economies and the green economic recovery.
- **Local Partnerships:** Local Partnerships have also been working closely with councils to support them with their leisure providers and ensure that they remain sustainable despite the challenges faced as a result of local and national lockdowns.

Supporting councils to respond to homelessness and housing issues

Housing and homelessness remained core issues throughout the COVID-19 crisis. The LGA has supported councils to respond to these issues through rough sleeping peer support and the Housing Advisors programme. We have provided councils with further support around building safety.

Highlights

- Our new **Rough Sleeping Peer Support offer was accessed by 222 councils** in receipt of Next Steps Accommodation Programme funding or other rough sleeping funding
- **88% of participants surveyed would be likely or very likely to recommend** a rough sleeping panel to another council
- The Housing Advisors Programme agreed funding for **17 projects involving 43 councils**, covering housing planning and delivery, with a focus on projects delivering carbon reduction, affordable housing, regeneration for low income households, as well as homelessness and homelessness prevention, including for 18-25 year olds.

Rough Sleeping Peer Support

The LGA worked jointly with MHCLG to develop and facilitate a [Rough Sleeping Peer Support offer](#) to assist councils in the next stage of their rough sleeping response. The offer involved the delivery of a programme of dynamic and inclusive **Delivery and Impact Panels (D&IP)**, which provided council lead officers with a safe space, framework and process to come together and reflect on their approach, share and challenge learning and highlight good practice from across the sector.

The programme was established to support processes relating to the **Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP)**—which involved an expectation from MHCLG that all participating councils would engage in a peer support process—but was later opened up all councils to support their rough sleeping response. Since the first panel in December 2020, over 220 councils had participated in a D&IP by the end of the financial year.

The LGA has captured key themes and emerging learning from the D&IPs, to inform national policy development, which will be published later this year.

Rough sleeping support: Satisfaction survey

The following provides a breakdown of key responses from Council Chief Executives that have participated in Rough Sleeping Peer Support.

- On a scale of (1 being very dissatisfied, 5 being very satisfied), respondents were asked how satisfied they were with their Delivery and Impact Panel. The average rating was 4.4.
- On a scale of (1 being very dissatisfied, 5 being very satisfied), respondents were asked how satisfied they were with the support and challenge provided by the facilitator. The average rating was 4.3.
- 82% of participants said the panel had met their goals and 16% said the panel had maybe met their goals
- Having participated in a Rough Sleeping Panel, 75% of respondents stated they feel a bit or a lot more confident in delivering their Council's rough sleeping plans.
- 88% of respondents said they would be likely or very likely to recommend a rough sleeping panel to another council

Housing Advisers Programme

In November 2020, we launched the [Housing Advisers 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. Funding was agreed for 17 projects involving 43 councils, covering housing planning and delivery, with a focus on projects delivering carbon reduction, affordable housing, regeneration for low-income households, as well as homelessness and homelessness prevention, including for 18-25 year olds.

Housing Advisers have supported councils to respond to the housing crisis and build organisational capacity by ensuring greater sustainability of projects in the longer term. The programme also helped to provide learning about what works, to ensure the wider sector benefit has benefited from that knowledge.

Building safety

The LGA assisted in the organisation and marketing of and presented at an event raising awareness of the implications for councils and fire services of the new Building Safety Bill. This was attended by **166 local authorities** and **27 fire and rescues services**. We are also developing a councillors' workbook on advising constituents with building safety issues.

Supporting service specific areas and other developments

The LGA's sector-led improvement programme included a range of sector-specific support, spanning areas including community cohesion, inequalities and devolution.

Highlights

- **Resources to address community cohesion and community safety issues**, including around domestic violence
- A range of **tools and resources to support councils** in responding to equalities issues, within the local government workforce in particular
- **Direct support to councils on COVID-19 compliance** and enforcement activity, local death management processes and devolution.

Community Cohesion

Local government has continued to respond to community cohesion and community safety issues, with many of these issues enhanced by the circumstances of the pandemic. To support councils on improving community safety, **we ran three webinars on tackling domestic abuse, tackling anti-social behaviour and identifying county lines and child criminal exploitation**. Across all three webinars, we had **almost 1,000 delegates engaged** in these sessions. With domestic abuse, unfortunately, increasing during lockdown measures, we **published a [resource guide](#)** accessible to all councils to help improve their response to tackling this issue. We also **worked closely with the Domestic Abuse Commissioner and the Home Office** to raise awareness of the "You Are Not Alone" campaign.

We also held a series of six workshops with MHCLG to **help local authorities prepare for the new statutory duty outlined in the Domestic Abuse Bill**. We also **published a case studies document [Taking a Public Health Approach to Tackling Serious Violent Crime](#)** to help share best practice and examples of local leadership in tackling serious violence.

The LGA **also provided direct support to councils on COVID-19 compliance and enforcement activity**, including by holding two extremely well-received webinars for councils on compliance and enforcement issues. In response to the significant rise in excess deaths across the UK during the COVID-19 pandemic, the LGA also **provided support to councils in local death management processes**, including lobbying government to improve its good practice guidance on **[Public Health Funerals](#)**, and **[guidance for arranging or attending a funeral during the coronavirus pandemic](#)**. This ensured the information provided to local authorities, the funeral sector and mourners was accurate and applicable, which councils have reported being useful.

Inequalities

With COVID-19 and other events from 2020/21 shining a spotlight on a range of inequalities issues faced by some community members, many councils were challenged to question how they understand and respond to **racism and wider equality issues, including** in their workplaces. We supported

councils in this area by **sharing good practice and providing research, insights, advice to encourage more inclusive practices, cultures and behaviours** and help ensure that workplaces were more accessible and engaging of all community members. This work is being further developed during 2021- 2022.

We continued to work with Government departments and national partners on developing and implement the **Workforce Race Equality Standard for social care in local government**, with the first cohort of councils on target to commence working with the WRES in April 2021. We have also prepared a range of webinars, guidance and other materials for councils to respond appropriately to workforce equality, diversity and inclusion issues for black and ethnic minority staff members.

A short course equality, diversity and inclusion for councillors: We delivered a package of leadership support to help councillors to gain skills to provide **more representative leadership, enhance equality and challenge discrimination**. This included a short course with four modules and that ran during spring.

Devolution and Transformation

We provided **direct support to councils around devolution** by delivering research on the experience of devolution of the last six years – including around the process of establishing a combined authority to provide examples of best practice and share learning with councils exploring the possibility of a combined authority. In addition, we have published several guidance documents including on CA communications, [The Drivers of Collaboration in Two-tier areas](#), and [Lessons Learned from established and emerging approaches to Sub-National Growth Bodies](#).

We also produced the **‘Town and parish council devolution’ framework** to guide principal authorities interested in supporting town and parish councils in their areas. We have engaged with NALC and across the Town and Parish sector to deliver this support and will be proceeding with publication following elections.

Supporting innovation and transformation

In 2020/21, the demand for innovation increased in line with the pandemic, which created new and enhanced challenges for local government. Our digital improvement offer and behavioural insights programmes have supported councils to innovate solutions and transform services in order to meet the new demands of this environment.

Highlights

- We set up a **Remote Council Meetings Hub**, comprising a central pool of information, advice, and guidance from partners. This hub received more than 56,000 views and was among the most popular pages on the LGA website.
- More than **100 councils benefited from LGA digital improvement programmes**

Remote meetings and digital improvement

The events of 2020/21 highlighted the primacy of digital technology, with COVID-19 and subsequent social distancing measures meaning that councils underwent massive technological change in a short amount of time. One key shift was around how councils held their meetings, which were traditionally face-to-face. The implementation of social distancing measures meant that this was no longer possible, and councils across the country had to work swiftly to set up virtual systems so that their organisations and local democracies could continue to function.

The LGA was quick to provide support with this challenge, setting up a [Remote Council Meetings Hub](#), which comprises a central pool of information, advice, and guidance from partners. The Hub was also built to include a public [Remote Council Meeting interactive map](#), which enabled users to identify the relevant video conferencing software being used, learn how meetings were being streamed to the public and press and provided details on meeting calendars for councils across England. With councils restricted to remote meetings for the duration of the year, the hub helped to ensure that council meetings continued as a platform for the voice of communities and their representatives throughout the pandemic. Underlying the value of this resource, the hub received a total of over **56,000 views** since it was launched in April and was among the most popular web pages on the LGA website that year.

The LGA's **digital improvement programme** offered councils further support with this shift by developing an extensive collection of case studies—outlining digital solutions to remote council meetings, service delivery, coding other digital tools—and by providing access to digital learning and development opportunities, including training and virtual events, including our **Digital Showcase Conference**, which had **175 attendees** registered this financial year.

Our **Digital Connectivity and Inclusion programmes** also continued, with the [Digital Connectivity Programme](#) providing councils with **access to grants and training opportunities** to build skills and capacity to take advantage of the opportunities offered by connectivity to local place and communities. The [Digital Inclusion Programme](#) involved work with ten councils and specific cohorts of residents to support those who lacked the skills, confidence and/or infrastructure to access digital tools and

solutions. As part of this programme, we also launched a Digital Inclusion Network to provide participating councils an avenue to network and **collaborate on digital inclusion development** and to support less developed councils with their digital inclusion projects in order to contribute to **improved life outcomes for community members**. The Digital Inclusion Network is made up of 35 councils with all regions represented by at least two councils.

The digital improvement programme also continues to deliver considerable value for money. This is in line with research by [Just Economics](#), which verified that **for every £1 invested in our digital programmes, councils had evidenced at least £5 savings**.

Behavioural Insights programme

The LGA's [Behavioural Insights programme](#) supports councils to employ behavioural tools ('nudges') to facilitate behavioural changes within local communities. The focus for this year was on changing and/or sustaining behaviours that communities have experienced and seen during the pandemic. All projects were scalable and have produced tools available to councils nationwide.

A new element in this programme is Nudges for Social Good, the LGA's behavioural insights podcast series, which was launched in 2020. This financial year, the podcast series was used to share COVID-19 related learning, including on topics such as encouraging local people to volunteer, supporting home workers and evolving 'green behaviours'.

The LGA also commissioned a suite of support for councils on behaviour change in collaboration with Test, Trace and Outbreak Management. This project involved providing councils with tools and information on how to use behavioural insights techniques to encourage vaccine uptake, including case studies, top tips and templates for councils to use.

Supporting research and benchmarking

The pandemic in 2020/21 highlighted the importance of data. It quickly became a pillar in the fight against the virus, and many authorities moved fast to use their existing data to identify vulnerable people, as well as working with government to access GP and other health data. The LGA has continued to support authorities to use their data effectively to respond to COVID-19 as well as in their day to day work. Over the year, the LGA provided councils with support to monitor their own performance and make better use of data in decision-making, as well as gathering insight into the council workforce.

Highlights

- **98 per cent of councils are signed up to LG Inform**, our comparative data service, which reached a new milestone of **3.65 million views**
- We created **13 COVID-19 reports**, which were **viewed 1.6m times during 2020/21**
- We established a new advanced and predictive analytics practitioners' network for local government
- Councillor briefing sessions on data and digital transformation were **attended by 121 councillors from 76 councils**

LG Inform

LG Inform is our free online data and benchmarking service, which provides all councils and fire and rescue services access to contextual and performance data for their local area. At least **98 per cent of councils are signed up to LG Inform**, with over 3,500 users registered on the site. In 2020/21 LG Inform passed the landmark figure of 3.5m views. There were **over one million sessions and 1.9 million page views** recorded in LG Inform during the year. Our team added an additional 2,250 metrics to the database, which now contains a total of nearly 9,000 data items. Typically, more than 2,000 updates are made each month to ensure the data within the database is current.

Reflections from LG Inform users

- “This entire body of work from LG Inform will be clearly recognised as one of the great strengths in the public authority response to COVID-19.”
- “The maps, in my opinion, continue to give the best at-a-glance view of the COVID-19 status in England.”
- “Well, although the news is depressing, your data presentation and tools are superb!”

The LG Inform **Value for Money Profiles** website was updated and received 4,600 visits and had 13,400 page views during 2020/21. Running alongside LG Inform, we provided an LG Inform Knowledge Hub group, which reached 929 members in 2021.

Due to the pandemic, face-to-face training in LG Inform was suspended during 2020/21. However, we ran a series of online LG Inform training events, attended by nearly 200 delegates from 49 different local authorities.

The creation of new reports in LG Inform by the Research and Information Team was an important work-stream for the programme this year. **Thirteen COVID-19 reports were created and viewed 1.6m times** in total. The local authority [COVID-19 cases tracker](#) was the most used report, with over 748,500 views. Some of the key reports generated or updated this year include COVID-19 reports ([COVID-19 vaccinations tracker overview](#), [COVID-19 and care homes](#) and [COVID-19 weekly deaths report](#)) and reports on other topics ([special educational needs and disabilities](#); [local green jobs](#); and [financial hardship and economic vulnerability](#)).

Advanced and predictive analytics

In November 2020, the LGA concluded research in the sector about the early take-up of predictive modelling and algorithmic practices in local government data analytics. Aligned with this, we published [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 established a new [practitioners' network for local government](#). This network, developed in partnership with the Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation (CDEI), was launched in December to connect practitioners, information managers, analysts and invited experts to work together to share learning. By the end of the 2020/21 financial year, the network had **attracted 215 members from more than 130 local authorities**. We also established an **advanced and predictive analytics** content hub, including good practices and useful tools, reports and guidance, offering near 150 items.

Data and digital transformation briefing sessions

Between January and March 2021, we delivered our **councillor briefing sessions on data and digital transformation** from the perspective of elected members. This year's events were virtual and **involved 121 councillor delegates from 76 councils**. Seven events were held in this year's series covering: inclusions and connectivity; smart technologies; social media tools and digital communications; better use and power of data; social care and shielding vulnerable people; cybersecurity; and digital leadership.

COVID-19 workforce survey

Since the start of the pandemic, the LGA gathered regular, frequent data from heads of human resources on the impact of COVID-19 on their workforce. [The COVID-19 Workforce Survey](#) was **(and still is) the single, national source** through which such data is gathered and is shared with government departments, as well as providing comparator information for councils.

Using UPRNs to respond to COVID-19

Jointly with GeoPlace, the LGA **developed a series of case studies with authorities who had used Unique Property Reference Numbers (UPRNs)** during the pandemic to link their data and that from government so they could respond rapidly to find people needing support. This included sharing the achievements and lessons learned. This content informed a step-by-step guide to using UPRNs, to help other authorities who want to derive benefit from linking data.

Supporting local government leadership

The LGA's **leadership offer** delivers the skills, experience and support councils need to address key issues and maintain effective leadership of place and community during COVID-19 and beyond. It includes a range of programmes, events and resources for people working in or aspiring to work in local government to help build local democracies that are effective, representative and vibrant.

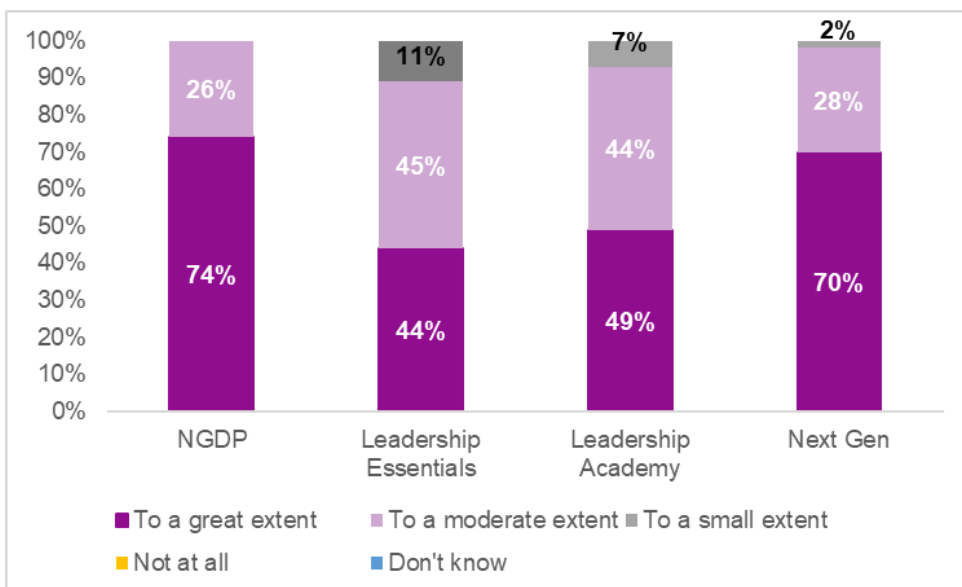
Highlights

- Since its launch, **3,150 elected members** from almost all English councils have graduated from the Leadership Academy
- The NGDP received more than **7,400 applications to the 2021** programme
- **377 delegates took part in Leadership Essentials** programmes in 2020/21
- **63 councillors took part in the Next Generation** programme
- We established **new coaching offers** for councillors and chief executives
- We launched a **new e-learning platform**, with expanded learning opportunities

This year, **538 councillors from 197 local authorities attended our 2020/21 political leadership programmes**. This included over 70 councillors who took up our new one-to-one leadership development programme. Owing to COVID-19, some programmes were delayed until October, and the majority took place between January to March.

For the first time since the programmes were launched in 2000, there were more women than men attending our leadership events (51 per cent female and 49 per cent male). Participation in our senior-level programmes by councillors from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds increased from 12 per cent last year to 14 per cent this year. Figure 1 draws upon data collected as part of this year's impact monitoring. It shows the responses delegates gave when asked if their participation in our leadership programmes had improved their ability to carry out their current role.

Figure 1: To what extent, if at all, do you think that participation in the following improved your ability to carry out your current role?



Base: NGDP, 23; Leadership Essentials, 82; Leadership Academy, 43; Next Generation, 43

Leadership Academy

The [Leadership Academy](#), our flagship development programme for councillors in leadership positions, celebrated its 21st anniversary this year. We refreshed the programme to respond to the current challenges faced by local leaders. **Over 3,150 elected members from almost every council in the country have graduated from the Leadership Academy** since its launch in 2000.

While in-person Leadership Academy sessions took place in October, we switched to a virtual delivery format following the reimplementing of COVID-19 restrictions later in the year – **81 members completed the programme**. Representation from councils grew, and **female participation rose over 40 per cent**, growing from 20 to 30 per cent in previous years.

In September 2020, we conducted an impact survey of councillors who had attended the Leadership Academy in 2019/20. All councillors who replied said participating in the Leadership Academy had helped to improve the way they carry out their role to a great, moderate or small extent. Twenty-one per cent of respondents had progressed to a new role or taken on additional roles or responsibilities since attending the course, and 12 per cent said they expected to progress soon. Of those councillors who had progressed or taken on a new role or responsibilities, all said participating in the programme had positively impacted their ability to do so.

Reflections from Leadership Academy

“...it was also good to learn from others and take their ideas to see if they would work back at my council.” (Conservative councillor)

“I have changed how I work with officers and become better at setting out a strategic direction.” (Green councillor)

“As a new councillor moving into a cabinet position, the Leadership Academy provided me with valuable advice...” (Labour councillor)

“Helped me to understand my leadership style and how to interact with members of my cabinet more effectively.” (Liberal Democrat councillor)

Source: [Leadership Academy impact survey 2019/20](#)

Leadership Essentials

Most [Leadership Essentials](#) programmes were delivered virtually this year to ensure councillors could continue with their development journeys. A wide range of programmes were delivered, including our new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion events programme. Other programmes included: Adult Social Care; Audit Committee; Being an Effective Cabinet Member; Children’s Services; Climate Emergency; Cultural Services; Fire and Rescue; Equality, Diversity and Inclusion; Effective Scrutiny, Finance; Leading Healthier Places; Media; and Planning Decision Making. A total of **377 delegates took part** this financial year.

In September 2020, all Leadership Essentials delegates were invited to complete an [impact survey](#). All respondents said the programme had helped them to improve the way they carry out their role, and 34 per cent of respondents had progressed to a new role – or had taken on additional roles or responsibilities – since attending their respective course. When asked how Leadership Essentials had helped councillors to improve or progress in their role, the key themes were: ‘networking and sharing experience and good practice’, ‘increased understanding and knowledge’, ‘developing a focus on a specific work area’, ‘confidence building’, ‘scrutiny and challenge’ and ‘developing communication skills’.

Reflections from Leadership Essentials

“The course broadened my outlook and has altered my approach to my work.” (Leadership Essentials, Cultural Services)

“I took a project forward on dental health for people in care homes. This was something I identified specifically during the training as a challenge I could take forward. I also went back and asked a lot of questions about things I had learned on the course.” (Leadership Essentials, Adult Social Care)

“Having taken part in this training I was able to win a place on the shadow cabinet where part of my role has responsibility for climate change within our group. I have been able to shape the council’s approach through scrutiny and I now sit on a cross-party working group on the issue. We continue to push for more ambition in dealing with the issue.” (Leadership Essentials, Climate Change)

“I have more confidence in my abilities therefore I doubt myself less.” (Leadership Essentials, Being an Effective Cabinet Member)

“It made me think differently and helped me structure a meeting with head of service in a more positive manner.” (Leadership Essentials, Housing)

Source: [Leadership Essentials impact survey 2019/20 - A survey of delegates](#)

Next Generation

The [Next Generation programme](#) offers ambitious and talented councillors from across the political spectrum the opportunity to develop in their careers through a tailored leadership programme. This year, **63 councillors took part** in either full virtual programmes run separately by the Liberal Democrats and the Independent Group Offices, or smaller bite-size sessions run separately by the Conservative and Labour Group Offices ahead of their full programmes to be delivered in Autumn 2021.

In October 2020, delegates from Next Generation 2019/20 programme were invited to take part in an [impact survey](#). All councillors participating said that taking part had helped to improve the way they carried out their role. At least **37 per cent of respondents had progressed to a new role** or taken on additional roles or responsibilities since the programme, and a further 14 per cent said this was

expected to happen soon. Of those respondents who had progressed or taken on new roles and responsibilities, all said Next Generation had positively impacted their progression.

Participants from the Liberal Democrat and Independent 2020/21 Next Generation programmes were surveyed in March.² All respondents said they felt more confident in their ability to carry out their role as a result.

Reflections from Next Generation

“Made me really consider myself as a leader. Has made me think about how I use my position to better effect across the council and wider.”

“I think one of the biggest things that I have learnt is how to reach out to others. Moreover, to be aware of self and understand the impact that I make...I am better able to understand the communities I serve. Much thanks for empowering me even more to do even better for the communities I serve.”

“The Next Generation course boosted the belief I had in my capabilities and enabled me to realise that my concerns were things that other councillors also had problems with, and that I was definitely not alone. In addition, the practical skills learnt such as public speaking have been useful to apply.”

“Meeting other councillors from different authorities has given me a great insight to how my local authority can change the way it does things for the better. I have promoted some of these ideas to senior members.”

Source: [Next Generation Impact Survey 2020/21](#)

National Graduate Development Programme (NGDP)

The **NGDP** is the flagship management development programme, which aims to create a pipeline of talent into local authorities across the country. It has been running for over 20 years and in 2021 recruited its 23rd cohort following **7,400 applications for the programme** –an increase of near 2000 on the previous year (and near 3000 from the year 2019).

Participants from the NGDP’s 19th cohort were surveyed in September 2020 about the impact of the programme, with 88 per cent of the graduates who responded working in local government or in another public sector role. All respondents said that the NGDP had improved their ability to carry out their current role, and more than 90 per cent said they had progressed their career or taken on additional roles or responsibilities since participating in the NGDP. All respondents said the NGDP had positively impacted their ability to progress and/or taken on additional role or responsibilities.

Participants from the NGDP’s 20th cohort were surveyed in August 2020 at the end of their programme. At least 78 per cent of respondents were satisfied with the programme, and 83 per cent said they felt

² The results of this survey will be combined with those from the Conservative and Labour Next Generation programmes once these have taken place; combined results will be published on the LGA’s website.

more confident in their ability to gain a management position in local government because of taking part.

Reflections from NGDP

“The management qualification was hugely helpful in developing into an effective manager, the placements gave me a wider understanding of local government and the improvement project gave me experience of contributing on a strategic level.”

“It has given me great insight into the different services within a council, allowing me to be more collaborative within my work and projects. The programme gave me a great awareness of the role and challenges within local government. Allowing me to see the big picture when delivering projects. I also developed my confidence and project management skills- giving me the belief that I can have a successful career in local government.”

“Moving around a council exposed me to different policies, management styles, work approaches and local government terminology. It first exposed me to recruitment, employment and skills work which directly informs my role now.”

“The NGDP allowed me to design and lead projects, write effective governance reports, communicate with and manage stakeholders, and increase my knowledge of social policy. I use all this skill and experience in my current role.”

Source: NGDP Participants Impact Survey 2020

Coaching for Chief Executives and senior officers

This year, alongside Solace, **we created a brand-new offer to provide emergency coaching for chief executives and other senior officers who were leading the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.** A total of 577 hours of coaching was delivered to 198 senior leaders (either council chief executive or their nominees).

Participants from the first cohort were surveyed in February. At least 98 per cent of respondents said the programme had been effective in supporting them personally in the COVID-19 environment, and 97 per cent said it had supported them professionally. All respondents said they would be likely to recommend this support offer in the future, with 92 per cent reporting that they would be ‘very likely’ to do so.³

Coaching for councillors

This year, **we launched a coaching programme for councillors** (leaders in particular), **to provide support with leadership challenges during COVID-19.** By the end of the year, 73 members had signed coaching agreements.

³ Results from the first cohort will be combined with those from the second cohort, alongside a series of case studies, and will be published on the LGA’s website later this year.

Be A Councillor

We also supported councils through our [Be a Councillor campaign](#), which encourages new talent into local government. This is done through providing councils with access to a toolkit and resources to support council delivery of local activities and virtual events. Our 'Be a Councillor' website and associated council microsites were transferred in-house to improve accessibility, user-friendliness and value for money. Work also started on refreshing the toolkit for councils with further equality, diversity and inclusion good practice to help councils reach out to people who are under-represented locally.

E-Learning Hub and resources

We developed a [new e-learning platform](#) to enable councillors to deepen their knowledge of local government and develop the essential leadership skills needed to work more effectively with their communities. Self-registration by councillors was made available on [the new e-learning platform](#) to facilitate easy access. The new platform creates a more streamlined learning experience, enabling councillors to create their own bespoke learning programme by choosing the modules most relevant to their needs.

We have produced a range of [webinars](#), [workbooks](#) and [e-learning](#) modules on COVID-19 related topics in order to build skills and capacity. These include:

- A [COVID-19 guidebook for cabinet members](#)
- An e-learning module on **handling intimidation**
- An updated e-learning module on **equality, diversity and unconscious bias**
- A [workbook](#) and e-learning module on **mentally healthier communities**
- An updated workbook on **local government finance**, supplemented with an e-learning module on financial and budgetary decisions in a COVID-19 environment
- A webinar on **chairing of remote meetings**
- A webinar on **mentally healthier conditions for councillors and communities**
- A webinar series on the **role of the ward councillor in responding to COVID-19**
- A webinar series on **effective opposition** during COVID-19
- A webinar on **rapid innovation** to support councils working toward recovery/renewal
- A webinar on **presentation skills** to build skills and confidence for virtual presentations
- A webinar on **coalition administrations**, identifying how to ensure robust, stable coalition working during COVID-19 and beyond

Supporting the local government workforce

Highlights

- **Pay negotiations** for 2020 pay award were successfully completed for near **1.9 local government employees**, saving the sector an estimated £20m a year (the approximate cost to the sector if negotiations were held at the local level)
- We established a **national Organisational Development (OD) network**, which brought together the **OD leads in over 70 councils** to share experiences and practice to help councils respond to the pandemic.
- We provided a range of **recruitment support** to supply councils with additional capacity during the COVID-19 response.

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the first national lockdown in March 2020, the [workforce offer](#) focused on how to support all areas of local government in its response. Government guidance was interpreted by the team who provided **employment law as well as practical employment advice, held webinars and updated FAQs on LGA webpages**. We continued to issue our **Employment Law Advisory Bulletins** as well as our monthly **Workforce Bulletin** detailing advice and activity, the circulation of which increased throughout the year to reach over 8,000 subscribers.

We supported local government in keeping schools open for all eligible children throughout the pandemic with joint employer and union school guidance, co-ordinating regional meetings every week at the start of the pandemic, delivering hot topic webinars and providing a helpline for local authorities as national guidance moved at pace. This approach was echoed across the local government workforce with more than a dozen joint communications agreed with national trade unions to facilitate employers' management of their workforces regarding contractual provisions, health and safety and compliance with government guidance. This saved councils valuable time and resource, enabling them to respond quickly to the public need and provide necessary reassurance to employees.

As well as pandemic response work, the Workforce team continued to deliver against business-as-usual objectives, including **strategic workforce advice and national pay negotiations**, concluding 11 agreements for the various local government bargaining groups, and submitting evidence to the School Teachers' Review Body (STRB) (on behalf of the National Employers' Organisation for School Teachers, NEOST) to cover teachers' pay and the Low Pay Commission to inform its National Living Wage recommendations.

There was a steady stream of **job evaluation and restructuring support, senior-level investigations and support in recruitment processes**, particularly at a senior level. We **established a national Organisational Development (OD) network**, which brought together the OD leads in over 70 councils to share experiences and practice to help councils respond to the pandemic. Our **workforce planning support** remained in high demand, with the team providing support to 38 councils that had requested help with strategic workforce planning in 2020/21. Our **apprenticeship programme** supported councils in making effective use of the apprenticeship levy, which included councils joining our webinars and utilising our tools.

The team moved all work online and created new networks of stakeholders, and adapted existing ones, utilising the new way of virtual working to support councils through an unprecedented time. Our

National Schools' Sounding Board went virtual, as did our **Annual Education Conference** and other events. We also launched our [React, Respond, Renew paper](#) in the summer of 2020, which set out many of the issues we are now dealing with in much more detail in terms of 'building back better', hybrid working and the 'new normal'.

We held **meetings of the National Association of Regional Employers** every week through the COVID-19 response and continue to do so fortnightly. This facilitated a direct transfer of information to and from council HR leads informing our information to MHCLG and the sharing of experience and practice in a timely way. Regional Employers also received additional bulletins and guidance to assist them in supporting their councils at a local level. Throughout the pandemic, we **ran sessions for the Combined Authorities HR Network** every 4-6 weeks to provide them with the latest information on the COVID response and to give them an opportunity to exchange issues and information. The group has also discussed future hybrid working, organisational development and salary arrangements for senior staff.

Responding to increased demands and focus on **employee wellbeing**, we produced a series of guides and toolkits for staff, including those in social care and schools, remote workers and those who had been furloughed. We worked closely with 'Our Frontline', the mental health charity created during the first wave of the pandemic and supported by the Royal Foundation of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge (a coalition of the charities Mind, Samaritans, Hospice UK and SHOUT). Our joint webinar was attended by over 600 participants.

We launched the **refreshed Standards for Employers of social workers** in September. The Standards set out the key components of whole systems approaches, and employers can use them to enhance their reputation as a service provider and employer by helping to develop a working environment where social work practice and social workers can flourish, in turn supporting recruitment and retention. Social workers across England were invited to take part in the [2020 health check](#) to measure how councils were implementing the refreshed Standards and how they had supported social workers through COVID-19. The Health Check closed in December, by which time 133 councils and near 9,300 social workers had taken part. That research then informs bespoke reports for participating councils, and more general advice and information shared via a webinar and ongoing support.

LGA return to work programmes, which respond to specific skills shortages, attracted 66 councils requiring skills and experience of returners in areas including social work, legal, ICT and planning. All four of these programmes identified and trained participants to ensure they were 'work ready'. Participants on the Return to Social Work Programme were supported in restoring their practice with Social Work England and securing work placements and jobs.

Those councils that registered their interest in offering employment were able to make contact with over 300 newly skilled and experienced participants.

We also launched a two '*Together*' programmes, which work via online platforms that help councils to identify qualified professionals who can fill very specific and/or urgent skills gaps:

- **Environmental Health Together:** This talent platform went live at the end of October 2020. It has **attracted 224 qualified Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) and 122 councils have subscribed**. Councils can use this resource free of charge to help support their

Environmental Health teams. The success of the project meant it is being extended into 2021.

- **Social Work Together:** This talent pool **registered over 1,000 qualified social workers**, with 108 councils subscribed. Councils can use this resource free of charge to help support their Social Work teams and avoid agency costs by employing them directly.

Supporting effective communications

Highlights

- The **COVID-19 communications hub**, featuring practical guidance on issues affecting council communications teams, resources on communications prioritisation, strategy development, insight and internal communications and case studies relating COVID-19.
- Our **bulletins for chief executives, leaders and communications leads** continue to be valued by subscribers, the number of which exceeds the industry standard
- A new **virtual communications health check** offer to support councils to review their recovery communications plans and learnings from the COVID-19 response.
- Attendance at LGA events increased from close to 1,400 in 2019/20 to near **10,000 in 2020/21** – an increase of near 600 per cent.

The events of 2020/21 required that councils engage with communities at an unprecedented level and pace. Our [communications offer](#) supported councils to deliver on heightened priorities relating to COVID-19 through a range of targeted support, featuring:

- **Media training workshops for directors of public health**, performed in conjunction with the ADPH, to support the provision of clear communication to residents during the pandemic. By April, more than half all Directors of Public Health received media training from the LGA.
- **Regular briefings for council chief executives and directors of public health**, hosted by LGA CEO Mark Lloyd, concentrated on Local Outbreak Plans and the Test and Trace service, with numbers attending ranging from 299-430.
- A new **virtual communications health check offer** to support councils to review their recovery communications plans and learnings from the COVID-19 response. Health checks and bespoke strategic support were provided to more than 30 councils.
- A comprehensive [COVID-19 communications hub](#), including practical guidance on issues affecting council communications teams, resources on communications prioritisation, strategy development, insight and internal communications and case studies relating COVID-19.
- A new programme of **COVID-19 communications events** sharing best practice and lessons learned from priority response issues such as local outbreaks, surge testing and increasing vaccine uptake.

Our communications offer provided councils with further support during 2020/21 by communicating key messages and guidance on COVID-19 and all range of issues and developments relating to local government in email bulletins from the Chairman, Chief Executive and Director of Communications. The frequency of our communications increased, with more than 300 bulletins published during the 2020/21 financial year. Feedback has highlighted these updates were highly valued by senior councillors and officers. The **number of subscribers is above 1000 for both the Chief Executive's and Chairman's bulletins and more than 3,000 for Director of Communications' bulletin**. With this subscriber list, our reach has exceeded the industry standard.

The shift toward virtual engagement also resulted in a substantial increase in the total number of events held. **The LGA's communications team led on 56 events in 2020/21** – more than double the amount held the previous year — the majority of which were oriented toward supporting councils and

their communities through COVID-19, including the LGA conference, first the first time made virtual. The conference, which focused in on the local government response to COVID-19 and recovery was transformed into a series of **13 free virtual events** and attracted **more than 4,000 virtual visits** from local government colleagues and partners.

A positive outcome of holding events virtually was that they became more accessible to councillors and officers, which meant attendance rates increased. **Attendance at LGA events increased from close to 1,400 in 2019/20 to near 10,000 in 2020/21 – an increase of near 600 per cent.** In February and March 2021 alone, we held fifteen COVID-19 centred events, which attracted 3,769 attendees. A number of events held during 2020/21 reached more than 300 attendees and our **Public Health Conference** – which included speakers such as Secretary of State Matt Hancock and CMO Chris Whitty – **received 2,778 virtual visits.**

Supporting the response to climate change

Highlights

- **90 per cent of English councils** have engaged with the **Climate Change Programme**
- A **new carbon accounting tool**, which has been downloaded by near **200 councils** and endorsed by the Committee for Climate Change.
- A new **Net Zero Innovation programme**, which brings together local authorities, universities and other stakeholders to address climate challenges at the local level and seek routes to achieve council's net zero commitments.

With climate change and its effects continuing to weigh on local areas, the majority of councils and the LGA have declared a climate emergency and are seeking ways to respond to and mitigate the climate crisis. The LGA's [climate change programme](#) provides a wide range of support to help councils address the issues of climate change and environmental sustainability, including a [new greenhouse gas accounting tool](#). This range of support has been extremely well used, with **90 per cent of councils in England and Wales having engaged with the Climate Change Programme**.

The LGA's greenhouse gas accounting tool, designed with support from Local Partnerships, provides councils with a means to measure emissions and compare impacts in a standardised way. Since its launch in September, the tool has since been downloaded more than **470 times by 179 councils - over half of all councils**. It was also **endorsed by the Climate Change Committee** with advice and a report on progress made on emissions targets sent to the UK Parliament.

We also launched the [Net Zero Innovation programme](#) in collaboration with the University College London (UCL), which brings together local authorities, universities and other stakeholders to address climate challenges at the local level and seek routes to achieve councils' net-zero commitments. The programme recognises that universities hold invaluable research and expertise that can help councils in achieving their ambitions, while councils are uniquely equipped to address climate change issues at the local level. Our [Design in the Public Sector programme](#) for 2020/21 was also focused on climate change. Delivered in partnership between the LGA and Design Council, the programme provided councils with design skills and methods to apply to their toughest local climate challenges and aspirations, including projects around supporting local businesses to understand and measure carbon emissions, low or zero-carbon transport options and designing green recovery strategies and action plans with a focus on environmental sustainability. There was an impressive number of applications for these two programmes, numbering 96 in total.

Alongside this support, our climate change programme provided a number of universally accessible tools and learning opportunities through our [climate change hub](#). The hub **received nearly 22,000 views during the year** and links to the totality of our climate change support, in addition to guidance, including a behaviour change and environment guide (receiving more than 2,500 views), **more than 62 case studies and pieces of notable practice**, and webinars. With some sessions attended by more than 400 people, our green webinars series proved vastly popular and spanned topics including renewable energy, the decarbonisation of transport, green reset (from COVID-19), scrutinising climate action, locking in green behaviours from the pandemic, the case for planting trees and how behavioural change techniques can be used to tackle climate change (and COVID-19). The LGA held 11 webinars

focusing on climate change and/or the environment during the year, with an average satisfaction rate above 90 per cent for 1,820 delegates attending.

As councils began to look to a future beyond COVID-19, green recovery also became a major focus for councils and of LGA support, which featured action learning sets supporting the creation of local green jobs, and work undertaken with Local Partnerships to develop **support for councils on green finance** as part of their green economic recovery offer.

Accessing the improvement offer: the role of LGA Principal Advisers

Principal Advisers are the LGA's focal point for discussions with councils about their improvement needs and the support we can make available – working with existing sector-owned improvement bodies at sub-national level and with regionally based colleagues supporting other programmes, such as the Care and Health Improvement Programme.

Principal Advisers also have a key role in identifying good and innovative practice, which is fed back into the LGA to inform the wider improvement offer to the sector.

Each Principal Adviser is responsible for one or more regions. Principal advisers have extensive experience of working at a senior level in local government and the wider local public sector.

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Peer Reflections

This report has shone a light on the wide-ranging value of SLI programmes. The following reflections are from peers involved in this work. These comments highlight the mutual value of our peer support work, which yields direct benefits for the councils that engage with this support as well as for the peers involved.

Kath O'Dwyer, Chief Executive, St Helens Council

"Having had the privilege of being part of, and leading, peer review teams in a number of councils, the **opportunity to support both authorities and colleagues** within the sector, to **identify and share good practice**, to identify learning to take back to the ranch and **make fabulous connections**, cannot be underestimated. I think the process is a **great opportunity for development and improvement for both the 'givers' and the 'receivers'**."

Nick Tustian, Chief Executive, Eastleigh Borough Council

"I cannot recommend enough the experience of leading a Peer Review. It's always a **great privilege** to be invited as part of a team to undertake the review of another Council, sharing the knowledge you have learned during your career in local government. However, in truth **the learning is both ways** – I've always found the experience to be both **informative and enriching** and something I would actively encourage others to take part in."

Bev Smith, Chief Executive, North West Leicestershire District Council

"It is a real privilege to be a peer reviewer for the LGA, the opportunity to spend time with other authorities, contributing to their journey of improvement and sharing best practice. **I have learnt so much from others and am able to bring back learning** to share within my own council.

I have also taken part on one of the new virtual peer reviews on COVID recovery with South Staffordshire, an excellent authority and a chance to share some of the challenges we have all faced this year.

I would encourage anyone to take the time to get involved, it's **great for your own personal development** and **so satisfying and rewarding** to be able to be part of another councils journey."

Joanna Ruffle, Executive Director (Transformation), Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

"I have been on 4 peer review teams now. It is a great way to immerse yourself intensively in another organisation and **I have learned so much** from them all and from my fellow peers. Some of this learning is now alive and well in Southend so **it really does make a difference**: not just to the Council being reviewed but to the peer authorities also (...) becoming a peer reviewer is **a great experience and adds real value to your own personal development** regardless of where are you are on your career journey. **I cannot recommend it highly enough.**