

Highlighting Political Leadership offer: 2021/22 Work update

Purpose of report

For information and decision

Summary

This report provides members with a brief update the LGA's political leadership offer for 2021/22. The report covers support to councils and councillors following the May 2021 elections and looks ahead to the programme of work for the forthcoming year. There is a particular focus on ensuring the right balance of virtual and in-person training, as we transition out of lockdown. This report encompasses aspects of councillor development work undertaken by the LGA's Regional Teams, the wider Improvement Directorate and the Leadership Team.

Recommendations

Members are:

- Requested to suggest or recommend any topics or themes for programmes that should be considered, in particular for e-learning modules
- Asked to comment on the work detailed in the report and make any recommendations for the future work programme

Action

Officers to progress this work in light of the Board's comments.

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Background

1. The LGA's Highlighting Political Leadership offer forms part of our wider package of sector-led support. We offer a range of programmes, events and resources aimed at supporting and developing councillors at all levels. This starts with support for prospective councillors with our Be a Councillor campaign, through to coaching and development for the most senior local government political leaders on our Leaders' Programme and Top Team work. This report will provide Board Members with an update on training and development opportunities offered to councillors during quarter one (April – June 2021) and, in particular, addresses the query raised at the last meeting of the Board: how will the leadership offer balance the benefits of both virtual and in-person learning as restrictions brought about by the pandemic ease?
2. Board Members will be aware that the 2021/22 Grant Determination Letter from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government includes the following key performance indicator:

“Aim to reach 2,000 councillors through all training and development opportunities offered”.
3. Under the previous Memorandum of Understanding with MHCLG, reporting focused primarily on the LGA's core leadership programmes such as Leadership Essentials, Next Generation and Leadership Academy. As the new target encompasses all training and development across the whole Sector Support offer, the statistics in this report present a holistic picture of training provided to councillors by both the leadership team, political group offices, colleagues in the regional teams and the rest of the Improvement division. It is intended to give Board Members a full view of the range and scope of leadership opportunities and demonstrate the significant demand from councillors for training and leadership support.

Support for newly elected councillors

4. The elections in May 2021 included seats in the scheduled 2021 elections; elections deferred from 2020; and by-elections from throughout 2020/21 – representing around 5,000 seats across the country. Contact with councillors following these elections presented an opportunity for the LGA to engage early-on with newly elected members, by welcoming them to local government, offering advice and encouraging them to access support via the LGA. An important part of this was our New Councillor Hub and our National Newly Elected Councillor Events.

New Councillor Hub

5. To support newly elected councillors, a '[New Councillor Hub](#)', hosted on the LGA website was launched. The Hub provides councillors with all the essential information they need and complements the induction support councils already have in place. It replaces our annual Councillors' Guide, and covers topics including: the councillor's

role; how local government is organised; and decision making. It includes information on the offers and services offered by the LGA with links to the political groups at the LGA; regional teams; information on our support and leadership development offers; and a host of other information essential for newly elected members. The hub includes welcome videos from the Chairman and councillors from county, unitary, metropolitan and district councils who share their reflections on the role and some top tips.

- 6 It is a live and evolving resource which will be updated and provide information and links relevant to new members. With the numbers of individuals visiting the hub currently at 3,000 this has developed into an important tool which has been able to reach a large number of councillors.

National Newly Elected Councillor Events

- 7 A key part of our engagement with newly elected councillors was the delivery of 3 virtual welcome events in June 2021. These sessions were led by the Regional Teams, with support from the Leadership Team. Offered in the morning, afternoon and evening to maximise attendance, these 90 minute sessions included an introductory session from Mark Lloyd and our Chairman, Cllr Jamieson, to provide a welcome and an overview of the key national priorities for the sector; a Q&A session with delegates; a session to outline further LGA support offers; breakout groups for delegates to meet in smaller groups with their regional LGA Teams; and groups led by the Political Group Offices with lead peers to talk about political support.
- 8 The events were cross-party and included different chairs for each of the 3 events: Cllr Sarah Rouse (Independent: Leader, Malvern Hills DC) chaired the first session; Cllr Lisa Smart (Liberal Democrats: Deputy Group Leader Stockport MBC and LGA regional peer) the second; and Cllr Judi Billing (Labour: Leader of the Labour Group, Hertfordshire CC and Deputy Chair, LGA Improvement and Innovation Board) the final session.
- 9 Promoted widely, including through LGA communications, First Magazine, regional teams and directly to councils via councillors and officers, more than 200 newly elected councillors attended the events across the 3 dates. As well as providing an opportunity to meet key LGA contacts and raise knowledge and awareness of local government issues, the events provided an opportunity to also promote and increase the numbers registered for our Leadership Programmes – with bookings for newly elected members expected to follow in the coming months, and encourage delegates to sign up to the LGA’s Annual Conference – where bookings increased by 65% over the period since the events started.
- 10 The question and answer session and discussions covered a number of queries from delegates including: the legal position on remote meetings; role of parish councils; work/life balance; ward working and social media tips. Delegates were also asked for feedback on the topics relevant to them to inform a series of webinars being developed for newly elected councillors – this has so far included suggestions on social media, scrutiny and managing your time as a councillor.

- 11 Feedback from the events has been very positive - with 88 per cent of delegates saying overall the session met their needs:
- 11.1 75 per cent of delegates felt more confident in their ability to carry out their new role having attended;
 - 11.2 79 per cent felt that the event increased their understanding of local government and the issues currently facing the sector to a great or moderate extent;
 - 11.3 92 per cent of delegates reported they had a great or moderate knowledge about the support available from LGA by the end of the event (compared with 42 per cent at the start);
 - 11.4 Delegate feedback also included that they found the events informative and that they enjoyed the opportunity for meeting in the smaller regional and political breakout groups. Participants also commented that they would welcome longer events in future, and would particularly value the opportunity of having more time in the breakout sessions.
- 12 This is the first year where these events have been offered to councillors online. Unlike previous years, where regional induction events have taken place in-person, a national virtual event supported participation and ensured the event was accessible to a wider range of newly elected councillors. In addition to the events detailed in this report, Q1 data shows that there were a further 6 induction events for councillors held across the Improvement Directorate. The induction events reached approximately 700 councillors and it is recognised that this early engagement will both promote the role of the LGA and increase participation from a wider range of councillors with our Sector Support offer.

Virtual training workshops

- 13 Alongside the national induction events, the LGA also offers bespoke workshops delivered by the regional or leadership teams, in partnership with the political group offices, where there are specific requirements or requests. These are often on topics such as scrutiny, chairing skills or member/officer relations. During Q1, 30 of such workshops have been delivered to up to 783 councillors. For the first time, the Leadership Team will also be offering some of these topics through a live webinar, available to councillors across the country, so that this training is widely available and accessible whether or not their council has requested bespoke support. The first of these sessions will take place on 21 July and will be on 'being an effective ward councillor'. Future sessions are being scheduled on social media and scrutiny. Board members are invited to recommend topics for the forward plan of webinars.

Digital resources

- 14 Central to the LGA's Highlighting Political Leadership offer, is a commitment to offer a blended and accessible learning offer: this means that alongside our residential and face-to-face courses we also have a number of digital resources such as e-Learning, videos and workbooks. The increase in online training options during the pandemic, has

prompted a review of the digital resources and this section sets out the plan for updating and refining these during 2021/22.

- 15 At the beginning of lockdown, the Leadership Team published a number of pre-recorded training webinars on topics such as ‘the role of the ward councillor in responding to Covid-19’. In total 7 webinars have been published and since the last report to IIB, we have added a further 2-part pre-recorded webinar: “mentally healthier conditions for councillors and communities”, to sit alongside the councillor workbook published on the same topic. Our pre-recorded webinars have now been viewed over 1,800 times.
- 16 Looking to the future, as restrictions ease and some of our training returns to an in-person setting, consideration has been given to what role pre-recorded videos will play in our overall leadership offer. Recognising that councillors often have competing demands on their time, future videos will be focussed on “need to know” information either on hot topics (e.g. a briefing on a current event) or business as usual tips for new councillors, for example charring skills. New videos will be shorter and full of tips to help councillors access helpful information in a time-efficient way.
- 17 While future video resources are likely to be short and succinct, it is recognised that for some topics, more detail is required. For those we can offer [councillor workbooks](#). Since last reporting to IIB, the following workbooks have been published:
 - 17.1 A councillor’s workbook on equality, diversity and inclusion
 - 17.2 A councillor’s workbook on the local pathway to net zero
 - 17.3 An updated workbook on Local Government Finance
 - 17.4 These workbooks provide a helpful, detailed resource, for councillors researching the topic for their portfolio or for a scrutiny review, for example.

E-Learning

- 18 Within the last year, the Leadership Team have invested in a new e-Learning platform. The new platform is much more user-friendly and has a modern look-and-feel that integrates well with the LGA’s website. The platform includes a tailored dashboard for users, meaning that they can easily navigate the courses that they’ve started. There is functionality within the platform that will be developed to improve the user experience: for example, the ability to set reminders or recommending courses based on portfolio.
- 19 As more councillors access training remotely, a fully functional e-Learning platform will be key. Within the Grant Determination Letter, we are required to introduce a minimum of 4 new e-Learning modules. Our strategy for introducing new modules focusses on two key themes:
 - 19.1 Modules should be on topics that people have a specific interest in: for example, we will be introducing a Biodiversity e-Learning module, in partnership with the LGA’s Productivity Team.

- 19.2 Modules should be on topics that councillors do as part of their induction: for example, we will be introducing a short module on Data Protection, which will set out what councillors need to know about it for their role. Councils often require councillors to undertake mandatory training on certain issues, and we've recognised an opportunity to support councils by creating short e-Learning modules on these topics.
- 20 It is recommended that the majority of our new modules fall into that second category. We aim to introduce short (about 20 minute) e-Learning options that cover "need to know" information for councillors.
- 21 Comments are welcome on whether Board members agree with this approach, and any recommendations for topics are sought.

Coaching, mentoring and one-to-one support

- 22 Members of the board will be aware that during the pandemic we introduced emergency one-to-one coaching support for councillors, to provide leadership development and a space for senior councillors to work through the issues they were facing as leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic. The coaching offer has now ended, and in total 75 councillors received one-to-one support. 100 per cent of those who responded to the feedback survey said that they were satisfied with the offer (96 per cent very satisfied). One-to-one support is still available in the form of mentoring via the political group offices and the regional teams, and in Q1 56 councillors have benefited from this offer.

In-person and residential political leadership programmes

- 23 A small number of the LGA's political leadership programmes were able to take place in the Autumn of 2020, however, the vast majority of our offer was delivered remotely during 2020/21. Under current guidance, it is expected that residential programmes will return in late July 2021, once the majority of restrictions have been lifted. The schedule of programmes for Autumn/Winter 2021/22 will include a variety of in-person, residential and virtual programmes to ensure that they are accessible to as many councillors as possible. There are currently 342 bookings on our suite of training programmes available through the Highlighting Political Leadership offer.
- 24 The leadership offer has evolved over the last year and adapted as a result of the pandemic. In the future, it is planned that the offer maintains some of the accessible, digital programmes that have emerged during COVID-19, but also gradually returns to more in-person and residential programmes. The Board has previously acknowledged that certain programmes, such as Next Generation, the BAME weekender, the women's weekender and the Leaders' Programme benefit from being in-person due to the ability to build networks and have trusted conversations in a safe space. With this in mind, these programmes will return to in-person, as long as it is safe to do so and government guidance allows it. Other programmes, such as the Effective Cabinet Member Programme, Leadership Academy and Leading Healthier Places are being offered as both virtual and in-person, so that delegates have choice.

25 Benefits of this blended approach, detailed in the report, are the increased accessible opportunities, allowing councillors from every region to access support in a way that best suits their own personal learning style.

Accessibility

26 Throughout this report, reference has been made to the potential opportunity to increase accessibility of the LGA's leadership programmes by offering them in virtual format. The tables below show the breakdown by ethnicity and gender of councillors attending programmes during 2020/21 (mostly virtual) compared to 2019/20 (mostly in-person).

27 While there has been a slight increase in the percentage of women attending programmes while they have been virtual, there has been a slight decrease in the number of people from a BAME background attending during 2020/21. It is therefore recommended that an approach that offers both virtual and face-to-face training be continued in the future to maximise accessibility.

Sex	2020/21	2019/20	Councillor Census
Male	49%	53%	63.3%
Female	51%	47%	35.7%

Ethnicity	2021/20	2019/20	Councillor census
White	86%	83%	96%
Asian	6%	10%	2%
Black	7%	6%	1%
Mixed Race	1%	1%	1%

28 There is currently less information available regarding disability. Our data shows that 39 councillors declared a disability on their forms during 2019/20, but only 11 during 2020/21. Declaring is often to ensure that reasonable adjustments are met and therefore it may be that fewer declarations were made while the programmes were virtual. The Leadership Team will consider whether there are any updates to the form that can be made to encourage more people to declare their protected characteristics.

Reporting and statistics

29 This report informed the Board of the approach taken to update and improve aspects of our current leadership offer as we transition from remote working. Consideration has been given to ensuring the benefits of remote learning are maintained, without losing the networking benefits of meeting in-person.

30 Throughout the report statistics have been quoted to demonstrate the number of training activities undertaken across the Improvement Directorate between 1 April 2021 – 30

June 2021. These, along with other development offers for councillors have been listed here, for ease:

Type of training or development	Number of sessions	Number of places
Induction	9	377
Mentoring and one-to-ones	n/a	56
Top Team sessions	5	49
Training/workshops	30	783

31 The high number of training offers taken up by council's during Q1 suggests that councils and councillors rely on the LGA for their councillor development requirements. This correlates with the most recent LGA Perceptions survey which found that 92 per cent of respondents said that "training for councillors" was the support that the LGA should continue providing, when asked. The LGA's core Highlighting Political Leadership programmes (Leadership Academy, Leadership Essentials etc), start in July 2021 and already have over 300 bookings confirmed and it is proposed that the next Leadership report brought to the Board focusses in more detail on progress against each of Leadership KPIs contained within the Grant Determination Letter. However, it is worth noting that at this point the most recent Impact surveys for our political leadership programmes (Leadership Academy, Leadership Essentials and Next Generation) show that 100 per cent of delegates felt they had improved their role as a result of attendance.

Next steps/Recommendations

32 Members are:

- 32.1 Requested to suggest or recommend any topics or themes for programmes that should be considered, in particular for e-learning modules
- 32.2 Asked to comment on the work detailed in the report and make any recommendations for the future work programme

Financial implications

33 All programmes will be met from existing budgets.

Implications for Wales

34 There are no direct implications for Wales. However, the Leadership Team continue to work with the Welsh LGA to ensure shared learning and coordinated plans for their respective leadership academies.