

Note of last Improvement & Innovation Board meeting

Title:	Improvement & Innovation Board
Date:	Thursday 29 July 2021
Venue:	Beecham Room, 7th Floor, 18 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ and online via Zoom

Attendance

An attendance list is attached as **Appendix A** to this note

Item Decisions and actions

1 Welcome, apologies and declarations of interest

The Chairman welcomed members to the meeting and explained that it was taking place as a trial hybrid in-person / online session.

Apologies were received from Cllr Andrew Western, Cllr Asma Begum, Cllr Alan Connett, Cllr Alice Perry, Cllr Sir Stephen Houghton and Lord Gary Porter.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 20 May 2021

Matters arising - The Chairman reported that following the concerns raised by IIB at its previous meeting, the LGA had decided to reverse its decision to charge for the Annual Conference in July.

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 May 2021 were agreed as an accurate record.

3 MHCLG Improvement Grant performance Report Quarter 1

The Chairman invited Mia Shelton, Improvement Strategy Adviser, to introduce the report.

Mia ran through the key points from the quarter 1 performance report to MHCLG and assured members that they were well on track to meet all the KPIs by the end of March 2022. The traffic light system being used only marked a KPI as 'green' when it had been completed, hence the high number of 'amber' indicators.

Members questions and comments:

- Members felt it was vital that the LGA got the message out to

councillors across the country about the variety and success of its support packages, as evidenced by the performance reporting. It was important that members didn't interpret the amber rating as meaning concerning or potentially off-track, as it did in most council RAG rating systems. Mia said that some of the key headlines would be shared through information bulletins to senior figures in councils and reassured members that they would be very clear on the RAG rating.

- The importance of maintaining focus on improvement work not directly linked to the KPIs was emphasised and also that work didn't stop once a target had been met. Mia confirmed that this was the case.
- Was there any flexibility in the agreement with MHCLG to alter targets during the year if urgent priorities emerged mid-year – e.g. extreme weather events, pandemic etc.? The Chairman said that MHCLG had their national priorities and that these may not necessarily be the same as the sector's. Flexibility might therefore be limited but it was important to keep an ongoing dialogue open with them.
- More detail was sought on the change of control support being offered to councils. Dennis Skinner said that it was mainly peer to peer mentoring from within the same political party, coordinated through the LGA political group offices. Places were made available on the LGA's leadership courses such as the Leadership Academy. Support was also provided to opposition groups who had relinquished council leadership post-election. Members strongly supported this latter element and felt it was important for the effective democratic functioning of these councils.
- Members asked what the reporting arrangements were with MHCLG. Dennis said that a performance monitoring group had been set up for LGA officers and MHCLG civil servants. The first of these had taken place. At a political level, there was an oversight board attended by the Minister and Cllrs Jamieson, Forbes and Fleming.

Decision:

Improvement & Innovation Board **noted** the report.

4 Voice of the sector: supporting rough sleepers at a time of national crisis - update on the LGA's Rough Sleeping Peer Support

The Chair invited Jo Allchurch, Senior Adviser, to introduce the report.

Jo ran through the key findings from the evaluation report into the LGA's Rough Sleeping Peer Support programme, delivered between December 2020 and February 2021, capturing the voice of the sector as it sought to implement the Government's Everyone In initiative. The LGA facilitated 28 Delivery and Impact Panels involving 222 councils during this time and

satisfaction levels were good.

Jo said that a webinar would be held to mark the publication of the report in August and to showcase the work of councils. Moving forward, the LGA would be working with councils to develop and deliver a future programme of Delivery and Impact Panels and other housing/homelessness sector-led improvement support. The report's recommendations would be fed into the LGA's ongoing policy work in this area. Dennis Skinner added that the LGA had given MHCLG an offer to provide a peer challenge for council's seeking to access additional funding and he would be following this up with them.

Members comments and questions:

- Members warmly welcomed the report and praised the LGA's work in supporting councils to deliver on a key Government priority. Everyone In showcased local government at its best, delivering in an extremely tight timescale with little notice. The Chairman asked officers to ensure that MHCLG ministers were aware of the report and local government's pivotal role. Jo said that Eddie Hughes MP had seen the report and they would ensure that it landed on Luke Hall MP's desk.
- Concerns were expressed about the consistency of support for vulnerable people in two-tier council areas where services were not necessarily all delivered by the same council.

Decision

Improvement & Innovation Board **noted** the report.

5 Finance Support Programme

The Chairman invited Alan Finch, Principal Adviser (finance), to introduce the report.

Alan ran through the financial challenges facing councils at the current time and then outlined the elements of the LGA's sector-led improvement financial support package for 2021-22. He emphasised that the support was for all councils, not just those that were having serious problems. In particular, he highlighted:

- The success of virtual Collaborative Finance Panels for CFOs, that had been introduced in response to Covid, but would become a permanent part of the finance offer.
- The establishment of a CFO Sounding Board to support the development and delivery of the finance programme.
- The recent trialling of an enhanced finance module for Corporate Peer Challenge. This had proved invaluable for peer teams and would be used in the future.

Members comments and questions:

- Members welcomed the formation of the new Sounding Board and asked whether it would be used to feed messages up to central Government. Alan said that they were hoping to use it more widely

- in the future to communicate with the wider sector.
- Clarity was sought over the relationship between the traditional Corporate Peer Challenge teams and the Financial Improvement & Sustainability Advisers (FISA). Alan explained that FISAs worked as independent associates who offered advice to councils on specific issues at their request. Their work was coordinated and moderated through the LGA's regional teams and they had helped to head off a lot of potentially more serious issues. FISAs were used to inform the delivery of Corporate Peer Challenge.
 - It was suggested that for the member peer support offer in paragraph 7.4, members with a broader local government experience, other than just finance, should be involved to help with wider political strategy and messaging around taking controversial decisions. Alan agreed that this broad experience was crucial.
 - As well as focussing on reducing risk, LGA support should look at helping councils to explore creative solutions to unlocking problems.

Decision:

- Improvement and Innovation Board **noted** the update.

6 Highlighting Political Leadership offer: 2021/22 Work update

The Chairman invited Cllr Judi Billing, Lead Member, and Helen Jenkins, Head of Leadership, to introduce the update.

Judi explained that it was not yet possible to provide a full detailed breakdown of participants on leadership courses by protected characteristics, but officers were working on this. However, the LGA should be proud of the fact that women and BAME councillors had always been over-represented at these events.

In relation to the Be a Councillor events and attracting a more diverse range of candidates, Judi said that the LGA was doing its best, but the Government needed to urgently provide councils with more flexibility over how to hold all their formal meetings and also to address issues around parental leave and pensions, all of which could put candidates off putting themselves forward.

Helen added that the first fully in-person leadership event had been held last week but it would be a challenge to balance the demand for in-person, virtual and hybrid meetings going forward.

Helen flagged up the record number of NGDP graduates who had joined the scheme so far this year (190), already exceeding the KPI, and offered congratulations to Grace Collins, who had been awarded an MBE for her work over 21 years in supporting various leadership programmes. Members of the Board echoed these sentiments.

Members comments and questions

- Political parties needed to have honest conversations about how

they select candidates for council elections. Members cited the 'Ask Her to Stand' campaign as an example of best practice and felt that this would be a positive way to attract more candidates from under-represented groups. Helen said that the LGA was actively involved in campaigns such as Ask Her and Operation Black Vote.

- Were any figures available on the correlation between the performance of a local authority and the extent of their engagement with the LGA on leadership development? Helen said that this could be provided.
- Whilst the new e-learning platform for training was welcomed, it was considered important not to lose all the benefits of face-to-face training and interaction.
- The virtual new councillor events were praised in relation to increasing participation and how interactive they were.

Decision:

Improvement & Innovation Board:

- **Noted** the update and **endorsed** the proposed future work programme.
- **Endorsed** the plans to enhance the 'Be a Councillor' campaign including bringing a full report to the next Board meeting on 7 October 2021 for agreement.

Actions:

- Provide breakdown of local authority performance vs engagement with the LGA. **Helen Jenkins.**

7 Update on LGA Economic Growth improvement support offer

The Chairman invited Susan Attard, Head of Productivity, to introduce the update.

Susan reported that the LGA's grant determination letter from MHCLG included providing two key support programmes – the Economic Growth Advisers' Programme and an Economic Resilience Programme. Based on feedback from last year's programme and from the regional teams, 9 out of the target of 10 councils had already been selected to benefit from working with the Economic Growth Advisers.

Susan then explained how the LGA was working to support individual councillors, both through the Economic Growth Leadership Essentials course and through developing a new e-learning module.

Finally, Susan spoke about the LGA's work to share best practice and urged members to contact officers if they had any projects or initiatives from their councils that could be used as case studies.

Members comments and questions:

- Members were keen to emphasise how this work supported the

Government's agenda for both building back post-covid and also for 'levelling up', and that this should, therefore, be a strong focus for the LGA's support offer.

- Members were also keen that the LGA's work was joined up with the work of groups such as Core Cities, in order to make best use of resources.

Decision:

- Improvement & Innovation Board **noted** the update and **endorsed** the LGA's support offer for 2021-22.

8 Update on the LGA Behavioural Insights programme

The Chairman invited Cllr Neil Prior, Lead Member, and Susan Attard, to introduce the update.

Neil highlighted the LGA's Nudges for Social Good podcast to members.

Susan explained that this year, in response to feedback from councils, the programme would be expanded and delivered through a consortium model, bringing groups of local authorities together to tackle a shared behavioural challenge. This approach would reduce the procurement burden on councils as well as enabling the programme to support more councils than in previous years. The LGA would be commissioning a supplier to work with 10 consortia to run a behavioural insights trial between September 2021 to March 2022. The LGA's annual Behavioural Insights conference in February 2022 would be an opportunity for councils to hear from those taking part in the programme.

Members comments and questions:

- How were the consortia of councils selected? Susan said that councils with similar issues would come together themselves with the LGA playing a co-ordinating role.

Decision:

- Improvement & Innovation Board **noted** the update.

9 Any other business

The Chairman put on record his thanks to all those members who would not be continuing on the Board from September.

Appendix A -Attendance

Position/Role	Councillor	Authority
Chairman	Cllr Peter Fleming OBE	Sevenoaks District Council
Vice-Chair	Cllr Liz Green	Kingston upon Thames Royal Borough Council
Deputy-Chair	Cllr Judi Billing MBE	Hertfordshire County Council
Deputy-Chair	Cllr Neil Prior	Pembrokeshire County Council
Members	Cllr Nigel Ashton	North Somerset Council
	Cllr Philip Broadhead	Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole Council
	Cllr Carl Les	North Yorkshire County Council
	Cllr Laura Miller	Dorset Council
	Cllr Damian White	Havering London Borough Council
	Cllr Phil North	Test Valley Borough Council
	Cllr Vince Maple	Medway Council
	Cllr Oliver Ryan	Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council
	Mayor Dave Hodgson MBE	Bedford Borough Council
	Cllr Mike Haines	Teignbridge District Council
	Cllr Anthony McKeown (as substitute)	High Peak Borough Council
	Cllr Miranda Williams (as substitute)	Royal Borough of Greenwich
	Cllr Alex Coley (as substitute)	Epsom & Ewell Borough Council
	Mr Richard Priestman	Independent observer
	Mr Philip Sellwood CBE	Independent observer
Apologies	Cllr Alice Perry	Islington Council
	Cllr Asma Begum	Tower Hamlets Council
	Cllr Andrew Western	Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council
	Cllr Wayne Davies	Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council
	Lord Gary Porter CBE	South Holland District Council
	Sir Stephen Houghton CBE	Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council
	Cllr Alan Connett	Teignbridge District Council
In Attendance	Cllr Rory Love	Kent County Council