

Priorities and Work Programme for 2014/15

Purpose of report

For discussion and agreement.

Summary

This report sets out the Board's current priorities and key areas of work for the 2014/15 year in the light of the LGA Business Plan for 2014/15, *Investing in our Nation's Future: The first 100 days of the next Government*, which was published at the LGA's Annual Conference, and the discussion at the last Board meeting around the end of year report.

Recommendation

That the Board discusses and agrees the priorities for the Board's work programme for the 2014/15 meeting cycle (**para 13**) and appoints portfolio holders (**para 16**).

Action

Officers to progress the Board's agreed priorities, reporting regularly to the Board. Subject to agreement of the priorities, officers to invite members to express preferences about those they would like to be more involved with (**para 16**).

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Priorities and Work Programme for 2014/15

Background

1. The LGA's policy Boards seek to lead the agenda for local government on the key challenges and issues within their remit and support the overall objectives of the organisation as set out in the LGA's Business Plan.
2. The Boards take an active role in helping to shape the Association's business plan through extensive engagement with councils and oversight of the programmes of work that deliver these strategic priorities.
3. The business plan and Boards' work programmes are underpinned by the LGA budget, which allocates resources to enable the Association to deliver the priorities in the business plan. It is important that each Board's work programme is focused on a defined set of priorities on which they can deliver significant impact and demonstrate value to councils. For the Improvement and Innovation Board, much of the work currently undertaken is funded by Revenue Support Grant (RSG) 'topslice'.

Priorities for local government

4. The LGA's Business Plan for 2014/15 sets out priorities for the organisation, which are based on those issues that matter most to our membership. For 2014/15 the three top priorities for local government are:
 - 4.1 **funding for local government** – reform of the finance system so councils have confidence their financing is sustainable and fair, opportunities to raise more funds locally, and greater ability to promote collective working across local public services
 - 4.2 **economic growth, jobs and prosperity** – councils are recognised as central to revitalising local economies
 - 4.3 **public service reform** – independent councils are at the centre, and seen to be at the centre, of public service reform, delivering more effective services for local people and holding other providers to account.

A copy of the Business Plan is accessible here

http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/12129/L14-99+LGA+business+plan+2014-15_A5_v13/4391618f-454e-406c-ba8c-6d5dadf5da56.

5. With the General Election seven months away, a significant amount of the LGA's efforts to achieve the Business Plan priorities will focus on lobbying the main political parties to ensure that future national politicians have a full appreciation of the value of local government and the need for a genuinely localist approach. This year's annual conference focused on *Investing in our Nation's Future: The First 100 Days of the Next Government* and set out the types of challenges any new Government will be faced with

and provided a local government offer on how to help them deal with the most pressing issues. Sections focused on: homes, school places, skills and jobs, shared prosperity and a healthy nation and made suggestions around the first Queen's Speech, first Budget and the first 100 days of the new Government. The 100 days publication is available here <http://100days.local.gov.uk/>.

Board 2014/15 work programme and resources

6. Running through the Business Plan are the LGA's core improvement services. As the LGA Business Plan indicates:

*At the heart of all this work, are our core services to councils which are driven by our belief in **sector-led improvement**. Supporting local government as the most efficient and accountable part of the public sector, the LGA will play a leading role in improvement and innovation so that councils can continue to make a difference in their local areas and to the lives of their residents.*

7. The Business Plan also reaffirms the LGA's role in maintaining an overview of performance and sets our approach to supporting councils and the LGA's role in providing and coordinating the necessary tools to support councils. An extract from the Business Plan is set out in italics below.

"Sector-led support, improvement and innovation – our core services

We will support councils with improving performance, effectiveness and efficiency.

8. *Our approach is based on four key principles:*

- 8.1 Councils are responsible for their own performance.*
- 8.2 Councils are primarily accountable to their local communities.*
- 8.3 Stronger local accountability and increased transparency drive improvement.*
- 8.4 Councils have collective responsibility for the performance of local government as a whole.*

9. *The role of the LGA is to maintain an overview of local government's performance with direct support for councils at risk, so the number of councils the Government has to intervene with is kept to a minimum. Regular meetings are held between the LGA's principal advisors and all councils, and use is made of data and intelligence to assess any risks, with support also being given to the sharing of good practice and expertise across local government.*

10. *Councils are making good use of the support we offer and a sector-led approach is proving effective in driving improvement, as well as identifying potential performance challenges and opportunities.*

11. *There is much peer support activity and through this work councils are demonstrating collective responsibility for local government as a whole, networking and sharing good practice and learning from each other. Our role is to provide and coordinate the necessary tools and support to enable this to happen*". An extract from the Business Plan providing further details of the support provided is set out at Appendix A, **attached**.
12. Although all LGA Boards have a contribution to make to supporting improvement, the Improvement and Innovation Board provides an overarching framework for this activity and works closely with other Boards (See para 17 below).
13. Based on the Business Plan priorities, the 100 Days work and the discussion at the last Board meeting around the end of year report, it is suggested that the Board's work programme for the coming year continues to be focused on the five agreed strategic themes for the Board:
 - 13.1 Sector-Led Improvement
 - 13.2 Productivity
 - 13.3 Innovation
 - 13.4 Leadership
 - 13.5 Transparency.
14. At the last Board meeting, members received a report that provided a brief summary of some of the key activities and outputs across the five strategic themes. Particularly for new members of the Board, this report is attached as **Appendix B**, as much of the activity is work that is due to continue.
15. Of course, the LGA's improvement offer needs to continue to develop and respond to the sector's needs. In the current financial climate, it is increasingly the case that councils are looking for good practice and support that helps them with aspects of their overall finances. This can range from support in achieving productivity or efficiency savings through to ways of helping them engage with their local communities on prioritising how they spend their reduced resources. We are currently developing a new finance offer and further details are set out elsewhere in the agenda. Of course, the LGA will also continue to lobby on behalf of the sector in order to achieve the best possible financial settlement for councils.

Board – Ways of Working

16. Currently, as a way of providing members with the opportunity to get more involved with the Board's work between meetings, the Board invites members to express preferences for areas/priorities they would like to be involved in. This allows the creation of a pool of interested councillors from varying political groups under each priority area. The nature of members' involvement will depend on the pattern of work in each area. The Board also appoints a lead member or "portfolio holder" for each area. The "Portfolio holders" will have a variety of roles, all of which are an extension of the role of members of the board. They might include: representing the Board at external and LGA events (speaking on behalf of the LGA and whole Board, not their political Group), engaging at a national level with key stakeholders, contributing to the planning and presentation of items within their portfolio to the Board, etc.

17. In addition, the Board will, in light of the outcome of the LGA governance review, hold an “overarching” umbrella remit on improvement. In order to give effect to this, the Improvement and Innovation Board on 15 July agreed that:
- 17.1 officers be asked to coordinate the flow of business through the Boards so that the Improvement and Innovation Board is invited to express strategic views about any significant improvement issues before other Boards
 - 17.2 during the year the Improvement and Innovation Board receives suitably timed progress reports on the major improvement programmes, for example:
 - 17.2.1 Children’s: around the Annual Ofsted report
 - 17.2.2 Corporate/Finance: around Budget time
 - 17.2.3 Adults/Health: around the annual Towards Excellence in Adult Social Care (TEASC) report of performance
 - 17.2.4 and relevant Board Chairs be invited to attend
 - 17.3 as far as possible, the Improvement and Innovation Board meets towards the end of each quarterly cycle of meetings so it can consider any significant issues put before other Boards and then report back to Boards at their next meeting.
 - 17.4 There is a separate report on the agenda describing the improvement activity currently being led by LGA Boards.

Communications

18. There is a number of internal and external communications channels available to help the Board promote the work it is doing and to seek views from our member authorities. We have a dedicated section on the LGA website, regular e-bulletins with a personal introduction from the Chair of the Board, outside speaking engagements and interviews, and features and news items in First magazine, which are used to keep in touch with our members.
19. Notwithstanding the positive picture painted by the evaluation of sector-led improvement and much of the feedback received around support and improvement activities, we cannot be complacent and need to continue in our efforts to raise the awareness of the support available and councils’ take up of it, making the links across the different strands of sector-led improvement. In recognition of this, the Leadership Board on 16 July 2014 approved the LGA campaigns for 2014/15, including a campaign on sector-led improvement. This will provide an opportunity for the LGA to refresh the way it communicates councils’ improvement and our efforts to support them.

Next Steps

20. Members are asked to discuss and agree the suggested strategic themes set out at **para 13**. Progress will be reported regularly to the Board and, as the body with responsibility for holding all Boards to account, every quarter the LGA Executive will also receive an overview of all Board’s work programmes and progress.

Financial Implications

21. While there are no additional financial implications or costs arising as a result of this report, it should be noted that much of the work set out is funded by RSG 'topslice'.

Appendix A

Sector-led support, improvement and innovation – our core services

(Extract from LGA Business Plan 2014/15)

Our role is to provide and coordinate the necessary tools and support to enable this to happen. This includes:

- In the current spending review period, a tailored corporate **peer challenge** to every council, including a core component looking at issues of leadership, corporate capacity and financial resilience, as well as service specific peer challenges. In 2014/15 we will deliver at least 100 peer challenges.
- **Leadership and managerial development programmes** which have already provided opportunities for hundreds of politicians and managers, equipping them to deal with the challenges being faced by their councils.
 - In 2014/15 we will provide development for at least 500 councillors with leadership roles in their councils – including those in opposition – through our newly refreshed suite of leadership programmes. These include cross-cutting programmes focusing on personal leadership development, leading innovation and change, leadership of communities and place, as well as service specific programmes.
 - We will support at least 50 ambitious and talented councillors with the potential to progress in their political careers through our **Next Generation** programme.
 - Our **Leading Edge** programme will give up to 50 leaders and chief executives the opportunity to work together on developing their leadership roles.
 - We will help councils, political groups and the national parties attract new talent through our **Be a Councillor** programme.
 - We will provide member peer support for councils where there has been a change of political control, and support in community leadership to new and existing ward councillors.
 - Through the **National Graduate Development Programme** we will recruit 75 high calibre graduates to local government, working with councils to secure interesting and challenging placements as part of a two year programme, building links with other public sector graduate programmes.
- Free access to councils, and also to the public, of transparent and **comparable performance information** through LG Inform. This online data benchmarking service enables the comparison and analysis of performance, financial and contextual information about authority areas to support the monitoring and scrutiny of performance and inform decision-making, increasing councils' accountability to local voters and taxpayers. LG Inform Plus will provide councils with access to small area data reports and tools, give support and guidance to councils and increase transparency to drive improvements.

- **Direct support** to councils through lead member peers and principal advisers, working to help them access appropriate support, especially councils with the most severe performance challenges. Our support will take account of the increasing financial pressure being faced by councils. We will provide bespoke support to at least 20 councils in 2014/15, aiming to ensure the Government does not need to intervene.
- Through our partnership with the Centre for Public Scrutiny, direct support to councils and councillors in developing **scrutiny skills and expertise**, holding local government and other parts of the public sector to account as democratically elected representatives.
- Practical support to help councils continue to develop new and innovative ways to improve **efficiency and productivity** as a major element of public service reform, focusing on adult social care, commissioning and procurement, including the roll-out of the Commissioning Academy and support to councils through the One Public Estate programme, future ways of working, and housing, waste and economic growth.
- Building on the lessons from the LGA/NESTA Creative Councils programme we will continue to work with councils and national **innovation** partners to support councils with developing, implementing and sharing innovative approaches to the medium and long-term challenges facing local communities and services.

In addition to the direct support funded through RSG 'topslice', we will provide sector-led improvement programmes in specific service areas, for which additional funding is being provided by sponsor bodies, including:

- the Planning Advisory Service
- community safety
- culture services in partnership with Arts Council England and Sport England
- the Department of Health funded Integrated Sector-Led Improvement Programme for Health and Care covering: Towards Excellence in Adult Social Care (TEASC), adult safeguarding, and support for the Integration and Better Care Fund
- support to health and wellbeing boards, and implementation of the Care Bill and the Winterbourne View Joint Improvement programme, delivered with partners such as ADASS.

Appendix B

Improvement and Innovation Board: Review of the Year

1. A particular highlight of the year was the positive findings emanating from our wide-ranging evaluation of sector-led improvement (published in May) that sought views from national stakeholders (including officials from government departments and the inspectorates), council leaders, chief executives and directors, and monitored a wide range of performance metrics.
2. The research findings demonstrate that:
 - 2.1. **Residents remain satisfied** with, and continue to trust, their local council, despite the increasing financial constraints being faced by the sector. More than two-thirds of people (70 per cent) are very/fairly satisfied with the way their council runs things and when asked whether they trusted councils or Government most to make decisions about how services were provided in their local area, 77 per cent of people said local councils.
 - 2.2. **Councils' performance continues to improve.** Analysis of a series of 97 metrics, across the full range of council activity shows a positive direction of travel, with approximately three quarters of the metrics having seen an improvement since 2010.
 - 2.3. The approach and offer of **support from the LGA is welcomed and valued by councils.** In a survey of senior members and officers, 93 per cent of leaders who were aware of the offer and 93 per cent of chief executives said that the support and resources offered by the LGA had had a positive impact on their authority.
3. This is a considerable achievement for the sector against a backdrop of councils nationally having their funding cut by 40 per cent in real terms since 2010, increased demographic pressures and national policy changes.

Innovation

4. The successful "Creative Councils" programme with NESTA drew to a close at a national showcasing event in November, following which we have reviewed and refreshed our work on innovation with a view to developing a more co-ordinated approach across the LGA with greater focus on dissemination of good practice. A key element has been the **Innovation Zone** at the LGA's Annual Conference, with opportunities to hear from over 40 different councils over three days sharing their innovative approaches to service redesign, demand management and use of new technologies.

Improvement

5. We have again increased the number of **peer challenges** delivered, from 96 in 2011/12, 136 in 2012/13 to 166 in 2013/14, across a wide range of service areas including 86 new corporate peer challenges. The external evaluation by Cardiff Business School reported in January and judged the corporate peer challenge to be delivering positive impacts and outcomes for the sector, with the quality of peer teams judged to be of an

extremely high calibre. By March 2014, councils had contributed more than 2,500 days of senior councillor and officer time to Corporate Peer Challenge teams representing a considerable investment by the sector in its own improvement, equivalent to millions of pounds worth of consultancy.

6. Working through the LGA's Lead Member Peers and Principal Advisers, we have provided targeted **support to individual councils** and groups of councils, for example: change of control support to 29 councils; bespoke peer mentoring support to 64 councils; delivery of top team development work to 13 councils; follow-up support to 55 councils who received peer challenge; and direct improvement support to 63 councils e.g. around financial sustainability or where councils are facing specific improvement challenges.
7. In March 2014, following a competitive bidding process, the LGA was appointed to create a new independent company to act as a **transitional body** when the Audit Commission closes. It will be responsible for managing the Commission's £85 million audit contracts as well as the Value for Money profiles when it closes at the end of March 2015. This will provide a solid foundation from which to offer the sector an approach to national procurement, which is estimated to save the public purse between £205 and £250 million over a five year period when compared against local appointment.

Productivity

8. Through our productivity programme we have been supporting councils with pooling resources and redesigning services, identifying the key productivity gains for local government and making sure councils deliver these savings quickly. For example:
 - 8.1. We have captured and promoted good practice of councils **sharing services**. Our interactive web-based map includes examples from 337 councils engaged in 383 shared service arrangements resulting in £357 million of efficiency savings.
 - 8.2. The joint LGA/Cabinet Office **One Public Estate programme** to help local and central government asset holders rationalize assets across central and local government is proving successful. To date the programme has seen the 12 local authorities involved save £88 million in capital receipts with £21 million in running costs with further long term savings expected. As a result the programme was extended in March 2014 as part of the Budget announcement, enabling a further 15 councils to participate.
 - 8.3. The **Adult Social Care Efficiency (ASCE) Programme** is now in its third and final year. Visits have been made to all 54 participating authorities to evaluate progress against objectives and gather evidence of efficiency savings. A concluding event will be held on 17 July when the final report will be published.
 - 8.4. **The Productivity Expert programme** has now funded over 40 councils to enable them to engage an expert to provide the necessary skills and expertise to help deliver efficiency savings. An investment of £150,000 of LGA funding is contributing to efficiency savings and income generation of over £53 million being identified and delivered by participating councils.

- 8.5. Our evaluation of the **Customer-Led Transformation programme**, which provided support to 63 projects, highlighted that the programme delivered over £331 million of financial benefit to the public and public services.
- 8.6. A combination of LGA lobbying and practical support enabled councils to get through the new “zero tolerance” compliance process for the **Public Service Network** introduced by the Cabinet Office. The public sector wide secure network enables the sharing of data securely, council to council, and council to government (and vice versa).

Supporting Political and Managerial Leadership

9. We have completed a thorough **review of our leadership offer** and will be launching the new offer at Annual Conference. “Highlighting Leadership” is the new umbrella brand encompassing the three refreshed and revised areas of leadership development support provided by the LGA: Political Leadership; Managerial Leadership and Top Team Leadership.
10. At the same time we continued to deliver a wide range of programmes designed to support local politicians, as they get to grips with the tremendous challenges facing the public sector. For example, our:
- 10.1. highly acclaimed **Leadership programmes** have supported almost 560 councillors in 2013-14, with 506 councillors attending the Leadership Academy. We have also provided support for a further 52 councillors through the **Next Generation** programme, which supports councillors with the potential to become the next set of leaders or cabinet members; and
- 10.2. **the National Graduate Development Programme (ngdp)** continues to be successful in attracting new officers into local government. The 2013 ngdp (Cohort 15) intake are coming to the end of their first year on the programme, with almost 90 graduates working in 40 councils across England and Wales. There has been a surge in demand this year with 120 places in over 50 councils across England and Wales.

Transparency

11. We have continued to help councils get to grips with the implications of the Code of Practice for Local Authorities on **Data Transparency**. Following LGA lobbying, Defra has approved £2.7 million in new burdens funding to local authorities to meet the Infrastructure for Spatial Information in the European Community Regulations 2009 (INSPIRE) obligations to publish geospatial data about the environment. We also secured £1 million in open data funding for authorities, via BIS’ local open data Breakthrough Fund.
12. The new version of **LG Inform**, our on-line data and benchmarking service, was successfully launched to both councils and the public in the autumn. It now has 92 per cent of councils registered and 2000 registered users; since its launch, the public site has had 32,331 visits from 15,418 unique visitors. We have continued to promote the new LG Inform to councils and to work with the sector to explore the potential for local and national benchmarking. Good progress has been made with LG Inform Plus (formerly

known as esd-toolkit), our subscription package for local authorities offering a range of additional data tools and access to ward-level data.

The future

13. We will focus on the further development of the sector's approach to improvement in the light of the findings of the evaluation and policy thinking in the run up to the next general election and we will work with other LGA Boards to implement the results of the recent LGA Governance review.