

Peer Support Review Update

Purpose of Report

For information.

Is this report confidential? No

Summary

This paper provides an update against the actions agreed arising from the peer support review, carried out last year and supported by discussions involving national lead member peers and the Heads of Political Group Offices.

The action plan (Annex 8A) has been updated with comments from the previous Improvement and Innovation Board.

LGA Plan Theme: Support for councillors

Recommendation(s)

That the Board note progress in implementing actions arising from the peer support review.

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Peer Support Review Update

Background

1. The Board received a report at its October 2022 meeting which outlined the findings of a review of the LGA's use of peers in its improvement support offers. The review found that member and officer peers make a vital contribution to these offers and are, on the whole, highly regarded. The report highlighted recommendations arising from the review which related to:
 - Recruitment of Member Peers;
 - Member Peer Mentoring;
 - Feedback on the quality of support provided by Member peers;
 - Particular challenges experienced by the Independent Group;
 - Member Peer Training and Development;
 - National and regional lead member peers;
 - Diversity of Member peers;
 - Member Peer profiles.
2. In February 2023, the Board received a further update and were provided a full action plan for comment. These comments have been worked into the action plan which has been updated. A full breakdown of the actions with updates against each can be found in **Annex 8A**.

Progress Update – Highlights

3. The following section highlights the progress achieved since the last Board update. The section is separated based on the 5 themes of the agreed action plan:

Recruitment and retention of an appropriately experienced, skilled and diverse cohort of peers

4. Officers from the LGA have undertaken an assessment exercise to map the current needs of peers related to peer challenge delivery and to understand future peer demand for this financial year, the Board will be kept updated once full details of this are available. Each type of peer challenge has been RAG rated

based on the number of peers available and the expertise required. Further work will need to be carried out once the Sector Support Programme grant is finalised with DLUHC and to adjust for changes after the May elections, which at the time of writing are not fully known.

5. Our peer support team have completed an Annual Report on LGA Corporate and Finance Peer Challenges (highlights can be found in **Item 7** of the Agenda, with the full Annual Report provided in **Annex 7A**). The report outlines the substantial positive impact CPCs have delivered in 2022/23 and has also reviewed the usage of member peers, as agreed as part of the peer review action plan, including setting out the equalities data of peers. With the initial review of the peer pool completed, the LGA will continue to work with the LGA's Lead Members, Political Group Offices and our member councils to increase the diversity of the peer pool and the proportion of peers sharing equalities information. Our work to ensure peer profiles are more up to date (including equalities information where peers are willing to share this) will support this.
6. The LGA has put in place plans to raise awareness of opportunities to become a member peer, and also to highlight the impact of the work overall at Annual Conference in July 2023. This includes a lunchtime session at the Innovation Zone, supported by Cllr Abi Brown, Chair of the Board.

Mentoring

7. The LGA has carried out a number of actions related to mentoring, delivered before elections took place to ensure mentoring was available to new councillors and councils, ensuring members were supported during any times of transition. The LGA has updated and re-launched the existing mentoring handbook and shared this with Political Group Offices and Regional Teams for further distribution. A new version of the handbook will be produced over the summer and made available via the LGA website.
8. Dates have now been scheduled for mentoring training for peers throughout 2023/24. These are due to take place in May, September, December 2023 and March, June 2024 and will be a mixture of in-person and online sessions. A tender to deliver the training is to go out in May. In addition, the LGA is exploring the potential to hold a member/peer weekend event focussed on aspects, such as mentoring, to further highlight the opportunity available and provide learning and support. Finally, a new process for recording and monitoring member mentoring has been drafted and shared with Regional Teams and Political Group Offices. Once these comments are addressed, the process will be shared with Lead Members for their consideration to then be implemented to ensure a more structured approach to mentoring delivery.

Member Peer Training

9. The LGA has progressed actions on Member Peer Training to increase the development opportunities available to peers and enhance aspects of the current offer. In the previous meeting, it was agreed by both Lead Members and the Improvement and Innovation Board that unless special circumstances were in place, all member peers would be expected to have attended or booked onto relevant peer training and to have attended a member peer conference at least once in the last 3 three years.
10. In addition, the LGA has agreed to pilot a peer challenge shadowing process for member peers on a non-payment basis. This has been agreed by all four Political Group Offices with a draft protocol produced. This will be shared with Lead Members for reference once dates for pilots scheduled. During and following this pilot phase, the LGA will monitor, review, and seek feedback on the implications of the draft protocol with the aim of introducing this as a standard part of member peer development.
11. The LGA has been working to develop a new programme of training for both officer and member peers. This will look to cover:
 - continued delivery of refreshed remote peer briefings,
 - a new programme of regionally delivered training,
 - a new programme of national member training.
12. Additionally, it is suggested that training include a focus on the delivery of corporate peer challenges due to its significance to the LGA's overall improvement offer. Political Group Offices have been contacted to progress the member training with all 4 groups agreeing to mixed sessions, these are being scheduled.
13. Further detail outlining our approach to member training will be shared with the Board in its July meeting.

Quality Assurance

14. Internally, the LGA has introduced improved processes and systems to share good practice on planning and delivering peer challenges, including how best to deliver support and feedback to peers. This also includes restarting a regular peer challenge manager meeting with colleagues across the Improvement Directorate to discuss any challenges and best approaches. Additionally, lead Principal Advisers have been identified to work with each Political Group Office and will attend meetings, join up activity with wider improvement work and discuss relevant insights.

15. As part of our ongoing conversations with Political Group Offices, we are exploring the opportunities to provide some form of performance appraisal and/or accreditation to peers. We will be carefully considering the cost benefit implications of introducing this once we have clarity following the 2023/24 Sector Support Programme DLUHC grant negotiations.

Management and Administration

16. As part of the peer support review, the LGA is making improvements to the existing systems and processes which support peer development. In the February 2022 meeting, a standard timescale of 10 days was agreed with Political Group Offices to respond to peer requests and resilience arrangements. A proposed technical solution (in two phases) to prompt member peers to update their peer profiles online has been designed: the Political Group Offices will be asked to approve the approach prior to implementation. Measures to better monitor overall peer activity, including training and payments, will be introduced in line with work on processes to ensure more effect monitoring and mentoring delivery.

Implications for Wales

17. Improvement support is provided directly to Welsh councils by the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA). On occasion, the LGA has responded to requests from Welsh councils to provide peer reviews to Welsh councils on a paid for basis, and there are some Welsh members in the LGA's peer pool. The improvements resulting from recommendations in the Peer Support Review will benefit those member peers and Welsh councils who receive peer support albeit on a paid for basis.

Financial Implications

18. Peer support activity is funded through the Sector Support Programme grant received from DLUHC.
19. Prioritisation of activities within the peer support review action plan will ensure that work is carried out within existing resources.

Equalities implications

20. The Peer Support Review explicitly considered equality, diversity and inclusion issues in respect of the LGA's peer support offer. Recommendations to increase the equalities data available on LGA peers (where they wish to share that information) will support the LGA to meet the needs of councils seeking peers to match the diversity of their own councillor cohort and populations, and to ensure that member peers with protected characteristics are not negatively impacted by processes for their selection for assignments and associated support.

Next steps

21. Lead Members and the Improvement and Innovation Board will continue to oversee progress against priority actions, informed by capacity and financial implications. A further update on progress will be brought to the Board in July.