

Improvement and Innovation

Background

1. The Improvement and Innovation Board (IIB) provides strategic oversight of the LGA's policy and improvement activity in relation to councils improving their performance and productivity - in line with the LGA's priorities and the Grant Determination Letter agreed with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC).
2. At its meeting in October 2022, the Board considered its priorities for 2022/23. These priorities draw extensively on the priorities set out in the LGA Plan and it was agreed for these to be:
 - 2.1 Peer Support
 - 2.2 Regional Improvement Support, Finance, and Governance
 - 2.3 Leadership support for Councillors and Officers
 - 2.4 Supporting local people and places – Improvement programmes including climate change support
 - 2.5 Data, Digital and Technology
 - 2.6 Sharing of notable practice
 - 2.7 Innovation Zone at the LGA Annual Conference.
3. Embedded throughout the above priorities, the Board also continued to oversee delivery of the Sector Support Offer which included...
 - 3.1 Sector Support programme (DLUHC funded and covering themes of Governance, Finance, Leadership, Workforce Place-based vision and Demand)
 - 3.2 Cyber, Digital and Technology
 - 3.3 One Public Estate (OPE)
 - 3.4 Planning Advisory Service (PAS)
 - 3.5 Partners in Care and Health (PCH)
 - 3.6 Children's Services Improvement
 - 3.7 Culture and Sport Improvement
4. This paper provides an overview of the achievements delivered against these priorities and programmes, as well as the work the LGA has been doing around

the launch of the Office for Local Government (Oflog), which falls within the Board's areas of responsibility.

Activity and highlights to deliver on Board Priorities 2022/23

5. The following provides some key highlights of our improvement and support work over the last year:

Office for Local Government (Oflog)

6. We have worked with DLUHC officials to ensure that the local government perspective informs the new Office for Local Government (Oflog). LGA officers and Cllr Abi Brown, Chairman of the Board, have met regularly with DLUHC officials and have provided further feedback as a member of the Oflog political leaders group meeting, regularly with the Minister. Alongside LGA Director of Improvement, Dennis Skinner, Cllr Brown has met with the Interim Chair of Oflog, Lord Amyas Morse and Interim Chief Executive, Josh Goodman several times.
7. Given local government already has a very strong record of data transparency, supported by our freely available, award-winning data platform, LG Inform, we have questioned the need for the Local Authority Data Explorer. We underlined the importance of co-production with the sector and the need for clarity around how this platform fits together with wider dashboards proposed by the Department for Education and other work on indicators being undertaken by the Department for Health and Social Care.
8. We have also urged Government to deepen its engagement with councils to identify and define future sets of metrics and that the dashboard should include a wider set of metrics, not just about council performance, including the need for data about the rest of the public sector (including central government) that is happening in their local authority area.
9. Oflog was formally launched this month by Rt. Hon. Michael Gove MP at the LGA Annual Conference. It will remain an ongoing project however and so we will continue to work with Government to ensure the sector voice informs the next stages of development and future iterations of the tool.

Peer Support Review

10. An internal review of the LGA's use of peers in its improvement support offers was undertaken in the Summer of 2022. The review found that member and officer peers make a vital contribution to these offers and are, on the whole,

highly regarded. Findings also suggested that more work was needed to ensure a consistently high quality of delivery and providing appropriate support to peers.

11. A priority shared by all Lead Members, work to implement the recommendations from the peer support review is continuing with notable progress having been made in the last few months.
12. An approach has been agreed for delivery of member peer training for 2023/24 with a focus on peer challenge. Dates are being scheduled for these events throughout the year with further development offered at our annual Member Peer Conference.
13. At LGA Conference, an event in the Innovation Zone celebrated the work of our peers. The event helped to raise awareness about the important work that peers do and the opportunities that being a peer provides, including to bring back that learning to their local authority.
14. We continue to progress actions to improve our peer data including the equalities information we hold. Solutions have been drafted to support peers to periodically update their data and ensure we have richer information to enhance our processes by better capturing and targeting peer skills and ensuring peer teams are more representative.

Improvement and Assurance Framework for Local Government

15. As part of the new sector support programme, the LGA is convening discussions with the sector, professional associations, and others to map the different [elements which provide assurance of council performance](#) and are used to hold the sector to account, in the interests of clarity and transparency.
16. A session was held at the LGA conference to explore with Chief Executives what 'assurance' mean and ask how well councils are able to use current mechanisms of internal and external accountability to assure themselves they are continuously improving. This session was facilitated by Barry Quirk (Adviser to the LGA, former Chief Executive of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and the London Borough of Lewisham), with anonymised feedback being fed into map the mapping exercise for the improvement and assurance framework.
17. [In our media release, LGA starts discussions on assurance framework for local government](#), 24 May 2023, [we invited the](#) sector views on the mapping exercise for the improvement assurance framework for local government.

Innovation Zone at the LGA Annual Conference

18. The LGA's Annual Conference took place on the 4 – 6 July 2023 at the Bournemouth International Centre. [The Innovation Zone \(IZ\)](#) is a significant part of the LGA's Annual Conference and offers a vibrant and creative space within the wider conference and involved a series of open, walk-in, sessions highlighting exciting ideas within the local government sector.
19. This year's theme was 'Challenge and Change' and all sessions featured in this year's programme were delivered either by councils themselves, or councils in collaboration with other public sector and private sector organisations.
20. Over 1600 delegates (not including speakers) were registered to attend this year's LGA Annual Conference, and the 2023 IZ successfully delivered over 50 presentations, from more than 100 speakers, from councils of all types and close partners from across the country. The IZ produced a huge amount of interest amongst delegates, with the majority of sessions being standing room only for attendance and upwards of 200 attendees present during certain intervals.
21. The conference featured a series of IZ parallel sessions, "Spotlight On...", and Celebrating Success Events, a new addition to the IZ programme. Many of these sessions were supported and facilitated by Improvement and Innovation Board Lead Members and Board Members who volunteered to contribute through the Innovation Zone Member-led Working Group.

Sector support programme

22. The funding period for the £18m agreement between the IDeA and DLUHC for 2022/23 concluded on 31 March 2023. This agreement was to fund a number of programmes spanning themes of Governance, Leadership, Finance, Workforce, Place-based vision and Demand.
23. An £18m agreement for 2023/24 has since been agreed, providing an updated sector support programme. While all of our support continues to be shaped through direct engagement with the sector, DLUHC were clear that this year's programme should focus on providing support across the following areas: Governance, Leadership, Finance and Workforce, as well as a new offer on Transformation. The new sector support programme, covering these five themes, has now been launched and is available to read on the LGA website: <https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/sector-support-offer-local-authorities-202324>
24. The new offer on Transformation will provide direct support and advice, as well as varied learning and development opportunities, to help local authorities

deliver on their transformation priorities, including to achieve efficiencies and improvements within service delivery.

25. There are also a number of new workstreams with in the continuing themes. This includes an expanded suite of leadership development offers which will such as a dedicated curriculum for chief executive development (co-produced with SOLACE) and a new recruitment campaign to market local government as a career of choice, attracting new talent into the sector to increasing capacity.
26. The following highlights demonstrate the positive impact of the sector support programme for 2022/23 and that the LGA's strong track record of delivery has been well maintained during the 2022/23 financial year:

27. Governance:

- 27.1 188 instances of peer challenge support were delivered including 55 Corporate Peer Challenges (CPCs)/Finance Peer Challenges, 48 progress reviews and 85 other instances of peer challenges/remote peer support.
- 27.2 100% of councils found that the process of preparing for and participating in a CPC had a positive impact on their council and would recommend the process to other councils.
- 27.3 94% of councils receiving post elections support said that it has helped the council.
- 27.4 LG Inform received more than 700,000 page views during 2022/23 alone.

28. Leadership:

- 28.1 Over 2,500 councillor attendees on training and development opportunities.
- 28.2 Our coaching programme provided bespoke support to 22 disabled councillors and 100% of respondents said the coaching offer has had a positive impact on their development.
- 28.3 99% of councillors that attended Leadership Essentials and 100% of councillors attending Leadership Academy said these programmes had helped them to improve the way they carry out their role.

29. Finance:

- **Direct finance support** was provided to 41 councils facing significant financial challenges, with 91% of councils receiving this support saying it had a positive impact for their council.
- 100% of councillor and officer respondents taking part in **financial learning and development opportunities** said that this support had improved their ability to carry out their role.

30. Workforce:

- **Targeted support was provided to over 50 councils** to address workforce challenges.
- Our **sector-wide Apprenticeship Health Check surveys** received a record number of responses from 172 councils.

31. Place based vision and Demand:

- 94% of councillors and senior officers receiving **direct communications support** said that this had a positive impact.
- 90% of councils receiving support through the **Economic Growth Advisors Programme** said that the programme had provided them with skills to address local economic challenges.
- 100% of respondents from cohort 5 of the **Housing Advisers Programme** said the support has had a positive impact on their capacity to deliver housing, homelessness provision and/or placemaking
- 99% of respondents receiving direct support from the **Climate Change programme**, said that the support has had a positive impact.
- The **Behavioural Insights (BI) Conference was attended by 429 delegates**, with 621 delegates in total attending BI events during the course of the financial year.

Children's Services Improvement

32. The [children's services improvement programme](#), which receives funding from the Department of Education, provides leadership support, diagnostic activity and range of training, development and mentoring. Recent highlights include:

- A series of webinars for specific corporate specialisms to further their understanding of their role in supporting children's services improvement, and to launch 'corporate core' toolkits developed to support this, including HR and finance.
- Facilitated conversations with the senior corporate leadership team on embedding a corporate parenting across all directorates of the council.
- An evaluation of the Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliances on behalf of the Children's Improvement Board has been carried out. An action plan has been developed to take forward recommendations on how the sector can continue to support the RIAs to drive improvement.

- Early Years Strategy reviews have been completed with 10 Local Authorities and a further three challenges focusing on speech and language.

Culture and Sport Improvement

33. The [LGA's partnership with Arts Council England](#) has provided critical support to developing the knowledge and skills of councillors and officers to champion cultural activity in their local areas, particularly in the context of cost of living, with the [LGA's partnership with Sport England](#) providing critical support to champion physical activity. Recent highlights include:

- In May 2023, the senior officer leadership programme began with a full cohort. The programme was oversubscribed, and a waiting list is being held for future programmes. Sessions delivered to date have covered current contexts, co-creation with local communities and health and wellbeing, with further sessions to be delivered by the end of July.
- The peer culture and library online peer challenge programme launched with 6 peer challenges scheduled between the end of June 2023 and September and the LGA has delivered an online leadership strengths session to alumni of the senior officer leadership programme.

Cyber, Digital and Technology

34. In recent months the [Cyber, Digital and Technology](#) programme delivered two Cyber 360s to both Plymouth and Merton and also facilitated a Cyber Reaction Exercise with RB Kensington and Chelsea and Central Bedfordshire.

35. Two new publications were published: [a Local Government Digitalisation Almanac](#), containing simple steps and practical examples to support councils realise the full benefits of digitalisation, and a '[10 Questions on Cyber Security](#)' guide, produced with the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny.

36. Four half day masterclasses for councillors on digitalisation were delivered, as well as three cyber security skills training for Chief Executives, delivered in partnership with Solace.

37. In conjunction with Solace and Socitm, [a joint response to draft legislation to support identity verification](#) was submitted.

One Public Estate (OPE)

38. Working with Cabinet Office, the OPE programme is currently [administering the Brownfield Land Release Fund 2](#) on behalf of DLUHC. The application window

closed on 31 March 2023, and bids submitted by councils are currently being assessed.

39. OPE exhibited at UKREIIF in May, promoting public estate collaboration and the brownfield land release fund, connecting with many local authorities, and celebrating the 10th anniversary of the OPE initiative.
40. OPE also recognised their [10 year anniversary](#) with a celebrating success event in the Innovation Zone at this year's Annual Conference.

Partners in Care and Health (PCH)

41. In our partnership with ADASS [the PCH programme](#) continues to deliver a range of contracts and provide for a broad range of adult social care sector led improvement including enhanced data analysis and support to respond to the outcomes of CQC interventions. Recent highlights include:
 - Tools and resources to support councils with the new Care Quality Commission assurance including our [Unpaid carers and Care Quality Assurance](#) toolkit which is designed to help councils with the process as it relates to unpaid carers.
 - Contributed to developing the [Digital working in adult social care: What Good Looks Like](#) guidance - co-developed with the adult social care sector through a series of workshops and in-depth interviews, drawing on expert support from the LGA and ADASS.
 - Simon Williams OBE, PCH's Director of Adult Social Care Improvement, [gave oral evidence](#) in June to the House of Lords Integration of Primary and Community Care Committee.

Planning Advisory Service (PAS)

42. [PAS](#) receive funding from a variety of income sources, including DLUHC, Defra and Natural England, to support councils on challenges with planning, local plans and implications of the planning reform agenda. Recent highlights include:
 - Developing the new [Pathways to Planning](#) graduate programme, launching in September 2023 and aiming to widen the pool of graduates entering planning roles in local authorities.
 - Supporting council engagement with a series of policy consultations and updates. PAS visited councils across the country to explain the proposed national planning policy framework and supported virtual events on the infrastructure levy, environmental outcome reports and design codes.

- PAS has also been helping councils prepare for the introduction of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) in November, both with the BNG directly but also the framework of nature recovery more generally.

Financial Implications

43. There are no financial implications resulting directly from this paper.

Equalities implications

44. The LGA is committed to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) standards. EDI considerations are embedded across our programmes with key examples in addition to those above including programmes such as the NGDP, Be a Councillor and our coaching offer for disabled councillors.

Next steps

45. Much of this information will be captured in the Annual Sector Support Publication. This will be published in the coming months and will be circulated to members of the Executive Advisory Board before its September meeting.