

Peer Support Review Update

Purpose of Report

For information.

Is this report confidential? No

Summary

This paper provides a summary of the activity carried out against the actions agreed arising from the peer support review. The review was carried out at the end of 2022, supported by discussions involving national lead member peers and the Heads of Political Group Offices.

A huge amount of work has been achieved in the last year to improve and promote our peer development offer. This momentum is set to be carried forward with activity planned to strengthen and better promote Corporate Peer Challenges (**Item 4**), further join up work between Improvement and Political Group Offices (Paper shared with Lead Members and PGOs) and renew our approach to peer training.

With this work agreed, it is recommended outstanding actions from the peer support review be included in these workstreams to streamline reporting.

The action plan (**Appendix 7B**) has been updated with progress marked against each action.

LGA Plan Theme: Support for councillors

Recommendations

That the Board

1. Note the significant improvement actions achieved as a result of the peer support review.
2. Agree that outstanding actions from the peer support review and wider identified work be included in priority workstreams around Corporate Peer Challenge, peer training and development of an Improvement Protocol. Work will continue via these mechanisms therefore with the peer support review formally ended.

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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, May and July 2023, the Board received a further update alongside an action plan for comment. These comments were used to inform an updated action plan. A full breakdown of the actions with updates against each can be found in **Appendix 7B**.

Summary of improvement achieved

3. The following section highlights the progress achieved by the peer support action plan since delivery began in February 2023. 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. The LGA's peer support team completed an [Annual Report](#) on LGA Corporate and Finance Peer Challenges for 2022/2023. The report shows that the Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) continues to be a highly effective tool at the heart of the LGA's sector support programme, with 100 per cent of chief executives and leaders who responded to a survey saying they would recommend having a CPC to other councils. The report reviewed the usage of member peers, as agreed as part of the peer support 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.

5. At the LGA Annual Conference, a session was delivered in the Innovation Zone (IZ), supported by Cllr Abi Brown, Chair of the Improvement and Innovation Board and Peter Fleming, Chair of the Innovation Zone Member Working Group. The session highlighted the excellent achievements of LGA peers in the last year and the unique experiences being a peer enables. In addition, all speakers on the IZ received information on the peer experience to further promote the opportunity.
6. Following the finalisation of negotiations for the 2023/24 sector support programme and the outcome of the May elections, the local government landscape has shifted, leading to changes in the demands for peers including the backgrounds of peers required. The LGA will continue to sign up peers proactively but is confident in its ability to deliver Corporate Peer Challenges, Finance Peer Challenges and Governance Peer Challenges with the current levels of peers recruited. An example of wider work achieved to enable delivery of peer challenges is the 30+ new officer peers recruited who are Monitoring Officers, Heads of Legal or Heads of Democratic Services to enable governance support.

Mentoring

7. Officers and Political Groups have worked hard to make mentoring more effective, to have quality assurance in its delivery, to improve training and resources and better promote the offer.
8. In March 2023, the then current mentoring handbook was refreshed and updated to be fit for purpose and shared via Political Group Offices (PGOs). The handbook has now been fully updated following consultation and will be provided to all mentors to inform their approach and help ensure proper process is known and followed. The handbook is [published](#) and freely available.
9. Mentoring training has been enhanced following a competitive tender process to find a supplier. Delivery of the renewed training has already begun, with sessions delivered in September and December 2023. Further dates have been scheduled to take place in March 2024 and June 2024, these will be a mixture of in-person and online sessions.
10. Content for the sessions utilises several coaching and mentoring models, such as GROW, The Trust Equation and The Gibbs Reflective Practice model. As well as referencing the LGA's new [Local leadership Framework](#). The models

used in the training are then balanced with practical advice and exercises on political mentoring to equip member peers attending with the skills and capabilities needed to provide effective mentoring to other elected members in councils across England.

11. Training and mentoring activity for member peers is being recorded on CRM to provide real oversight on the impact of our offer and allow us to demonstrate the value we add including to DLUHC as part of our Grant Determination Letter reporting and negotiations.
12. Officer peer mentoring across the LGA has been mapped across regional teams and more widely. Following consideration, it is planned to provide guidance on the mentoring best practice for officers and a process to ensure officer mentoring activity is captured. This will be included as part of overall peer development approach with discussions to continue with IIB Lead Members.

Member Peer Training

13. As part of the review, the LGA has progressed actions on Member Peer Training to increase the development opportunities available to peers and enhance aspects of the current offer.
14. A new programme of peer challenge training for member peers was developed with a strong focus on enabling effective delivery of corporate peer challenges. Delivery of the training has already begun delivery with a session held on 19 September and 21 November 2023, further sessions are agreed for 16 January 2024 and 21 March 2024. In addition, A renewed and strengthened timetable of officer peer online briefings was relaunched earlier this year. As of end of November we have delivered 14 online peer training sessions with 148 delegates (both officers and members), all of which have now joined the peer pool.
15. Training sessions and their attendees are now being recorded on CRM. It had been previously agreed in February 2023 with IIB Lead Members 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. Work is being undertaken to ensure this policy is maintained whilst ensuring critical business can progress particularly, in cases where peers are notably experienced.
16. Our training approach is supplemented by our annual peer conference, held this year on November 8 and 9. The peer conference was the biggest ever, taking place for the first time, over two days, with 140 members peers from across the country attending. The extensive agenda included a keynote address from experienced commissioners who shared insights and learning from their work with challenged councils including what this means for SLI and Corporate Peer

Challenge. Throughout the two days, peers participated in a series of practical development sessions covering a range of topics including assurance and governance, future of SLI, people services and regulation, transformation, how to have difficult conversations and a session for new and less experienced Member Peers.

17. 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. Dates are being agreed to pilot.
18. Work has been undertaken to refresh the peer induction pack to make sure it reflects the current development offer and the up-to-date needs both of the LGA and importantly, local government.

Quality Assurance

19. The LGA has looked to increase oversight of peer performance and open more channels to discuss issues as they arise and work jointly to address any emerging challenges or improvement opportunities.
20. Notably this includes ensuring each PGO has a main Principal Adviser contact to strengthen links with improvement (including regional teams) and allow more direct communication regarding peers and the delivery of support. Feedback is provided to the relevant PGOs on completion of each Corporate Peer Challenge – providing an opportunity to flag any issues regarding Member Peer performance. The LGA has also established an internal Peer Challenge managers meeting and Peer Challenge champions network to share notable practice and look to address emerging issues.
21. In February 2022, it was agreed with Political Group Offices to respond to peer requests within 10 days. This will be reiterated and set out also in the upcoming Improvement Protocol.
22. The Peer Support Review has also considered whether to reintroduce a form of peer accreditation/assessment through a paper shared with Lead Members in October 2023. It has been agreed that budget restrictions necessitate a different approach from what previously existed. Options to progress this work and further improve peer training and development opportunities is being progressed with IIB lead members including the potential to roll-out a new accreditation approach. This will build on existing arrangements including formal induction for peers and supplement the training that many peers have already accessed through the Highlighting Political Leadership offer.

Management and Administration

23. The principles of an Improvement Protocol have been drafted to improve internal processes including our management and administration of peer activity. The principles cover commitments to continue to monitor the peer pool and have oversight over any gaps in skills and/or diversity, ensure proper process around member peer payment and allocation, ensure channels remain open to discuss peer performance, ensure lead national member peers have a clear role and ensure record keeping is appropriate to deliver agreed improvement actions. Agreed internal actions will be undertaken to ensure systems and working processes are appropriate to achieve these changes.
24. It was agreed by Lead Members in February that the current limit for use of member peers - a maximum of 40 days per annum - should be maintained. Exceptional instances for use of member peers beyond the maximum of 40 days would continue to need approval by the Director of Improvement. Further work to streamline data to ensure information on allocation of days is more easily accessible and in one place is being planned. This will be incorporated into the Improvement Protocol, which has been shared in draft with lead members and PGOs, and progressed internally on a cross-team basis.
25. Work is underway on a technical solution to prompt peers to provide updates on their own peer profiles. Following unsuccessful trials of an interim solution, a long-term solution is on track to be tested by the Political Group Offices in January 2024 and then made live. The delivery of both member and officer peer training is also being used as an opportunity to encourage peers to keep their peer profiles up to date.
26. CRM data recording has improved in the organisation. Training attendance for both peer challenge and mentoring, and Member Peer Conference are recorded on CRM allowing oversight of who is attending and to inform training prioritisation.

Implications for Wales

27. 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

28. Peer support activity is funded through the Sector Support Programme grant received from DLUHC.
29. Prioritisation of activities within the peer support review action plan has ensured that work carried out was within existing resources.

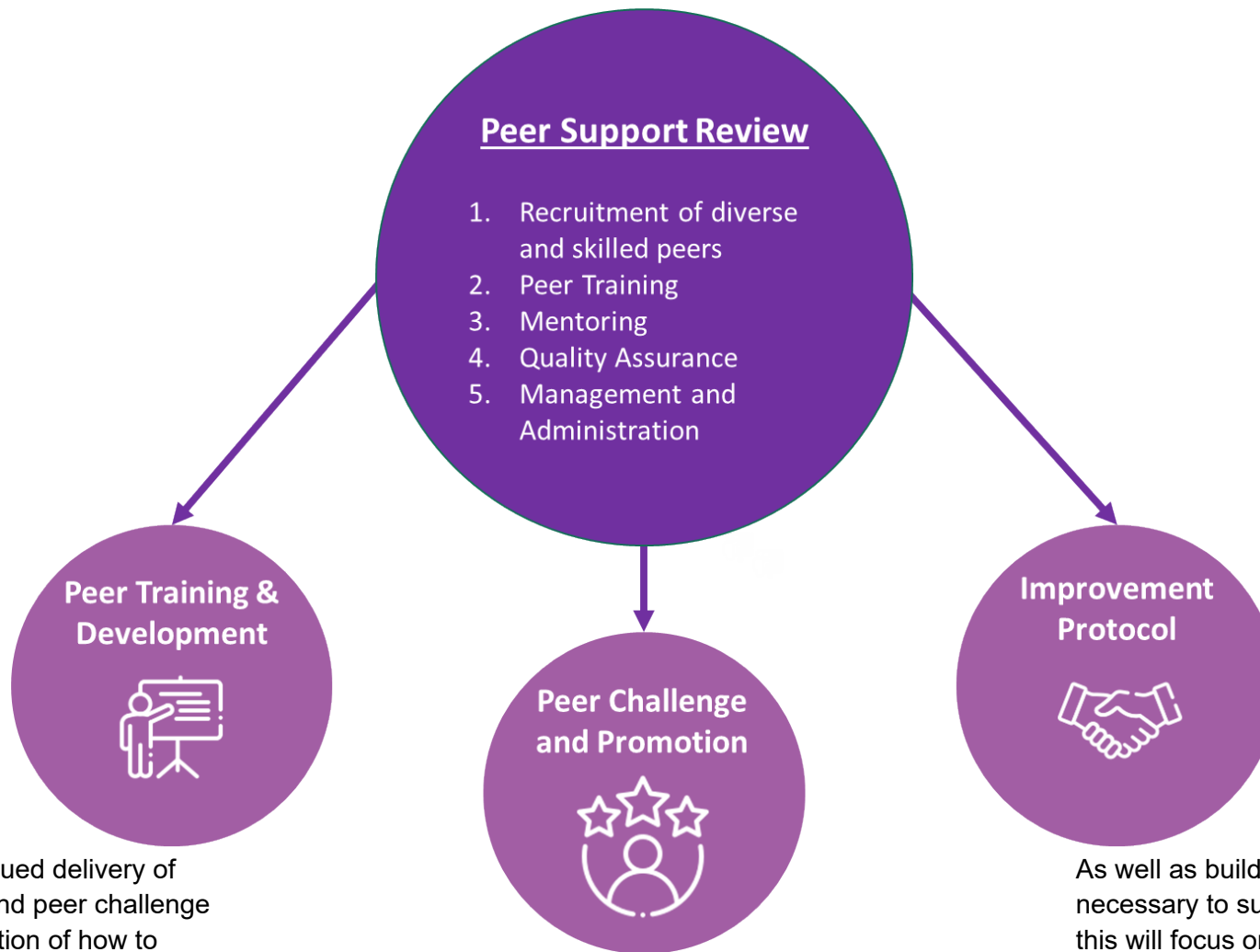
Equalities implications

30. The Peer Support Review explicitly considered equality, diversity and inclusion issues in respect of the LGA's peer support offer. Recommendations to assess the diversity of the LGA's peer pool have been completed and shared with IIB following the annual review of CPC performance and themes. Performance in this area was reflective of the sector overall.
31. It is anticipated that, by enabling member peers to update their own peer profiles with automated prompting, the LGA will be better able to match peers with councils' requirements for peer teams to match the diversity of their own populations. The organisation will also have greater oversight of any gaps in the peer pool and can consider further appropriate action.

Next Steps

32. To date a significant amount of work has been undertaken as part of the peer support review. A full outline can be seen in **Appendix 7B** noting the progress against every action and the impact achieved.
33. Since the completion of the review, notable developments have taken place which have seen several priority workstreams emerge (see **Appendix 7A**). These include continued work to update our peer development offer, to continue to look for opportunities to strengthen the peer challenge process and better promote the excellent impact and value they already have and to commit to improving internal work between the Improvement directorate and PGOs via an improvement protocol.
34. To deliver on these new priorities it is suggested remaining actions from the peer support review are incorporated into these emerging workstreams to streamline activity and reporting to various stakeholders (see below).
35. Lead Members and the Improvement and Innovation Board will continue to be regularly updated on these measures through these workstreams.

Appendix 7A - Breakdown of how further work from the peer support review will be progressed.



This will include continued delivery of refreshed mentoring and peer challenge training and consideration of how to further improve peer training for both officers and members. Work in this area will be regularly reported to Lead Members with updates to wider board members to come as work progresses for decision.

This will include work to better promote and demonstrate the robustness and value of Corporate Peer Challenge as well as continue to refresh and improve the overall peer challenge approach. Updates on peer challenge will come to IIB as work progresses.

As well as building working agreements necessary to support the other workstreams, this will focus on internal management and administration challenges including ensuring a diverse peer pool, that the LGA has strong oversight of peer activity and payments, and peer allocation.