

Improvement Update on Delivery October – December 2023

Purpose of Report

For information.

Is this report confidential? No

Summary

This report updates on the delivery of programmes across Improvement and provides key highlights for each area. This includes an update on progress of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) funded sector support programme and improvement programmes funded separately to the DLUHC sector support grant.

LGA Plan Theme: One politically led organisation

Recommendation

That the Board

Note updates on the programmes outlined in the paper.

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Background

1. The sector support offer continues to be shaped through direct engagement with councils to ensure that they have the support they most need to respond to a wide range of challenges and opportunities. This offer includes the Sector Support Programme, funded via an £18m improvement grant from DLUHC, and wider improvement programmes, covering children's services improvement; adult social care (Partners in Care and Health); cyber, digital and technology; One Public Estate; planning (PAS); and culture and sport.
2. This report highlights progress and updates from across the aforementioned support areas.

Sector support programme

3. The Sector Support programme for 2023/24 provides local authorities with vital tools and support to deliver critical services to communities, while helping to drive change and improvement across all regions. This support covers five key themes: governance, leadership, finance, workforce and transformation.
4. The next quarterly performance report is due to the Board at the end of quarter 3. As the quarter 3 period is ongoing, we are not able to provide this report at this stage, this report covers performance highlights from October-end November. The Board will receive the complete update on Q3 performance at its next meeting.

Governance

5. The LGA continues to work on its programme of Corporate, Finance and Governance Peer Challenges. Peer support and regional teams have this financial year so far delivered 54 programmes of peer challenge, including 28 councils who have had corporate peer challenges. A further 52 instances of peer challenge have been confirmed, bringing the total for this financial year to 106, with even more peer challenges in discussion.
6. The National Member Peer Conference was held 8-9 November with over 140 Member Peers from across the country in attendance. Throughout the two days, peers enjoyed participating in a series of practical and interactive development sessions covering a range of topics including assurance and governance, future of Sector Led Improvement (SLI), people services and regulation, transformation, how to have difficult conversations and a session for new and less experienced Member Peers. Feedback and insights from the conference

will be used to shape our SLI offer so that we can continue to ensure that this meets the needs of councils.

7. A second phase of engagement with the sector on a draft improvement and assurance framework for local government is commencing, to run until the end of February 2024. This phase will consider ways in which current measures can be simplified or enhanced.

Leadership

8. The new [Chief Executive Development Framework and Hub](#) developed with Solace and the LGA was launched at the Solace conference on 19 October 2023. The framework has been well received by Chief Executives and work is underway to develop [pilot training modules](#) for three of the seven themes within the framework in the first instance.
9. Applications for the 26th cohort of the [NGDP](#) opened in October 2023 and we have received a record number of applications at this stage, receiving more than 1,000 within the first few weeks.
10. Cohorts for the [Next Generation](#) programme have been confirmed for all LGA political group offices. There are 68 councillors taking part in the 2023/24 programme. Modules started in October and will continue through to March 2024. Highlights of the 2022/23 programme can now be viewed [online](#).
11. Colleagues from across the leadership team, workforce team, communications directorate and the North East regional team have been working on the development of a national recruitment campaign for local government, with a pilot launching in January 2024. Sector engagement is ongoing nationally and with the region, including the North East comms network. A brand communications agency has been procured and is currently undertaking research and testing approaches leading to a final creative solution.

Finance

12. The finance improvement programme continues to deliver at pace and since October has run two events for councillors on finance without numbers – an introduction to local government finance, which collectively saw over 120 delegates attend.
13. A first for the programme, on 15 November we delivered an event on the Future of Local Government Finance for current NGDP and alumni. The event saw over 50 delegates attend in person at Smith Square and initial feedback has been extremely positive.

14. We have held a series of highly successful roundtables to discuss the findings of research into councils with experience of finance and governance challenges which had led to either a s114 report or a capitalisation direction, to help identify and share learning for the wider sector. This research was carried out by Human Engine after Chief Finance Officers told us that they felt the lessons of recent financial failures had not been understood or shared with the sector. Feedback from sessions has been very positive.

Workforce

15. Surveys on agency usage and capacity issues have been launched for adult social care, finance, legal, IT, building control and environmental health with a further survey on children's services to be launched in the new year. Activity on the research project involving collection and collation of workforce data, including capacity indicators, pay, HR metrics, has also begun. The LGA is working with NARE (National Association for Regional Employers) to develop initial baseline HR metrics and identify other quantitative and qualitative measures.
16. Our programme of Apprenticeship Pathway events began in November 2023 with four online events focusing on areas where a significant number of councils have been assessed as Early or Developing against our Apprenticeships Maturity Model (the two lowest assessment ratings). More Pathway events, aligned with the skills shortage areas above have been scheduled for February and March.
17. With support for the LGA's workforce team, agreement was reached on 1 November on the 2023-24 pay award for local government services ('Green Book') for an increase of £1,925 on all pay points and 3.88 per cent on all locally determined pay points above the top of the national pay spine. Agreements were also reached for Chief Executives and for Chief Officers on the 2023 pay award for 3.50 per cent.

Transformation

18. We have now recruited 96 Transformation Experts from councils to provide transformation support to other local authorities.
19. Our programme of Transformation masterclasses has begun, including a session on the councillor role in transformation masterclass was held on 25 October looking at Community Focused Transformation. Delegates from 36 councils were in attendance.

20. The programme team also delivered a workshop at the LGA Member Peer Conference on the 'Councillor Role in Transformation' with 44 elected members attending.

Separately funded programmes

Specialist Graduate Programmes

21. In August 2023 the LGA secured a grant from DLUHC to deliver [Pathways to Planning](#) – a programme to support aspiring graduates into the planning sector. The grant totals £1.6m and will help to deliver two cohorts, in 2023-24 and 2024-25.
22. 21 councils are taking place in the first cohort, which will recruit up to 30 graduates, to be placed with councils by March 2024. We received almost 500 applications from a very diverse range of candidates who were interested in the programme. Candidates will go through several further assessments before they are matched with participating councils in February 2024. Councils can also now sign up to Cohort 2, which has 120 spaces available and applications remaining open until early 2024.
23. Ongoing comms and marketing, including paid ads, has already led to more than 17,000 page views on the candidate website. Plans for marketing for cohort two are underway, including the procurement of a videographer/photographer for promotional material.

Children's Services Improvement

24. The programme has submitted an extensive evidence pack to the Department for Education to highlight the impact of LGAs children's improvement programme over the last two years, with the aim of securing a 12 month extension to the current contract, which runs until March 2023. The report included a range of qualitative and quantitative feedback, including – participation from 526 councillors, with a role in children's services, in an LGA learning and development event after which 95% reported an increased confidence to undertake their role.
25. We have also increased capacity and expertise across our peer pool by delivering two peer training residential events – one trained 16 SEND peers and the second trained 17 early years peers, and both will ensure we are able to deliver on specific peer challenge targets set by the DfE.
26. There has been increasing engagement from councils in the children's scrutiny offer with five scrutiny committees receiving intensive support in the past few

weeks and a further three councils due to participate in the near future.

Planning Advisory Service (PAS)

27. PAS are working hard to prepare for the introduction of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain in January 2024. This represents a big change initially for major planning applications and we are expecting a raft of updates to planning guidance and policy to help councils implement it.
28. Delivery against the grant agreement that PAS have with DLUHC continues to progress very well. As mentioned earlier, our newest project – [pathways to planning](#) – is attracting significant interest already and represents a way of bringing in new talent and capacity to address planning needs in local authorities.

One Public Estate (OPE)

29. The third and final round of Brownfield Land Release Fund 2 is expected to be announced in autumn 2023, with up to £80 million being made available to support councils to bring forwards surplus council-owned land for housing. The fund will help councils transform unused, redundant or derelict council-owned sites into high quality homes for their communities, with the capital funding available to support measures such as demolition, asbestos removal and remediation.
30. Councils continue to release land to deliver housing schemes from previous BLRF awards. As at end of July 2023 councils had released land with a capacity for 5194 homes. 632 homes have been completed, with many more under construction. Many schemes provide affordable and specialist housing.
31. The OPE programme continues to support central and local government to work collaboratively to bring forwards public estate projects. Looking forwards, a wider OPE Support Offer is in development, aiming to make a range of resources easily available to councils.

Cyber, Digital and Technology

32. On November 9, we held a flagship day conference for Women in Tech in Local Government, launching a community to connect, collaborate and celebrate unique achievements and opportunities for women in the sector.
33. We also launched our Artificial Intelligence (AI) Network, with 120 council officers registering as members, and 96 attending the first meeting, which focused on different approaches to the governance of AI within councils.
34. We have conducted a Business Continuity Exercise at Oldham Council and delivered a Cyber 360 at Nuneaton & Bedworth Council.

Partners in Care and Health (PCH)

35. Partners in Care and Health have so far hosted over 15 events with local authorities during, providing expert support to local authorities on key subject matters, delivering an effective knowledge transfer approach to local authorities through the offering of insight, analysis, and the application of good practice from across the sector. In total, PCH event have had over 1,000 attendees over this reporting period.
36. Quarter 2 saw the publication of 10 Universal Support tools from across the PCH Workstreams. The universal support tools include the development of guidance documents, toolkits and self-assessment frameworks, designed to enable local authorities to review their current delivery approaches to social care, assess opportunities for improvement and, implement a coordinated approach to ensuring their service delivery aligns with recommended best practice.

Sustainability

37. An online [Sustainability Hub](#) for the new Sustainability programme funded by Crown Commercial Service was officially launched on 7 November. The hub offers a wide range of resources to help councils address environmental sustainability based on the key three pillars: building capability, tools and networks.
38. The Greenhouse Gas Accounting Tool is featured on the Sustainability Hub and provides a straightforward and consistent approach for councils seeking to calculate their own carbon baseline. Featured alongside the tool is a Waste Emissions Calculator to assist with carbon foot printing.

Sector support communications

39. This section provides members with an overview of the work of the communications directorate to support improvement directorate activities and lobbying issues of interest to the Improvement and Innovation Board.

Campaigns and marketing

40. The campaigns and marketing team continue to support and promote our improvement offers, publicising good practice and encouraging engagement and uptake across the sector.

41. In addition to supporting the activities above, some key recent examples include:

41.1. Promoted and supported the LGA Member (Councillor) Peer Conference with a promotional video, live tweeting of sessions, and refreshed Peer Support programme web content.

41.2. Published new web content for our new Transformation programme and refreshed the LGA research webpages with a focus on promoting LG Inform.

41.3. Promoted the chief finance officer mentoring scheme.

41.4. Published 'Establishing modern slavery risk assessment and due diligence in adult social care – a commissioning officer's guide' in association with University of Nottingham Rights Lab

Events

42. The corporate events team have run a range of improvement related events. These events have included transformation workshops and masterclasses, training on data and managing council performance, and a workshop for members on building confidence. Events evaluated so far have scored an average 96 per cent organisation satisfaction rating.

Media Relations

43. Alongside regular articles in [first magazine](#), our Improvement work continues to feature in both national and trade media with over 20 articles since July.

44. Some key examples include:

44.1. [After the crash: The future of sector led improvement](#) (23 October 2023)

An article in the **Local Government Chronicle** discussing the effectiveness and future of sector led improvement, including comment from Board Chairman Cllr Abi Brown.

44.2. [The trouble with Oflog](#) (23 October 2023)

An Article in the **MJ** that notes the potential issues and risks surrounding Oflog. Featuring a piece from Board Chairman Cllr Abi Brown highlighting the sector led improvement work of the LGA, including LG Inform as an essential tool and resource to facilitate council improvement.

44.3. [LGA Tories to beef up appointment process for member peers](#) (24 October 2023)

A **Local Government Chronicle** article discussing the work to strengthen the appointment process for member peers. Conservative National Lead Peer Cllr William Nunn provided comment.

44.4. [Peer reviews, the heat is on](#) (20 November)

MJ article exploring the effectiveness of peer challenge and future possibilities for the support offer. With commentary from LGA Director of Improvement, Dennis Skinner.

Public Affairs

45. The LGA attended the Liberal Democrat, Conservative, Labour and Green Party Conferences and highlighted our commitment to remain on the pulse of developments with councils across the country and support councils to improve. We also briefed councillors for a range of external debates across the Party Conferences, highlighting the LGA's vision of enabling and empowering councils to place renewed emphasis on innovation in delivering and financing high-quality and responsive public services.
46. We continue to monitor parliamentary activity with implications for sector improvement and innovation. Recently this has included supporting councillors to [give evidence](#) to the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee inquiry into [financial distress in local authorities](#).
47. Following the government reshuffle in the week commencing 13 November, the LGA Chair, Councillor Shaun Davies and Acting Chief Executive, Sarah Pickup, met Simon Hoare MP on day two in his new role as local government minister. The constructive meeting provided an opportunity to talk about the LGA's improvement offer and work with councils, with the minister keen to follow up

with more detailed discussions about the LGA's critique of Oflog. The Chair has written to, and will follow up, with other new appointments relevant to the LGA.

Implications for Wales

48. The Sector Support Offer funded to provide support for English authorities. The LGA looks to make resources available to WLGA and Welsh authorities where this is possible.

Financial Implications

49. There are no financial implications resulting directly from this paper, though good performance against all grant agreements is a significant factor in continuing to secure grant funding.

Equalities implications

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

Next steps

51. Officers will continue to capture the delivery of our improvement offer against respective grant agreements, with regular updates provided to the Improvement and Innovation Board to map highlights and progress.