

Improvement and Innovation Board – Report from Cllr Abi Brown OBE (Chairman)

Office for Local Government (Oflog)

1. We have continued to work with officials to remind them of the need to co-design Oflog to ensure that it delivers benefits for the sector.
2. Following discussions in which I raised the need for a regular meeting for political leaders on Oflog, I, along with the Chair and LGA Group Leaders, and leaders of other sector bodies have been invited to attend a Political Advisory Group. This has been described as a channel for Oflog to regularly consult and receive feedback from political leaders in the sector on Oflog's development. The first meeting of the Group will be early in 2024.
3. We submitted a response to the consultation on new draft metrics in which we set out our concerns about their proposals. Changes made in the final set reflect some of the points established in our response. However, our concerns about Data Explorer, including the ability to draw meaningful comparisons from its metrics, remain.
4. We have also made [a submission](#) to the inquiry on Oflog carried out by the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities select committee. We highlighted the need to establish opportunities for local government to collaborate and help shape the work of Oflog in capturing and sharing good practice.

Improvement and Assurance Framework for Local Government

5. The LGA is developing an Improvement and Assurance framework for the local government sector, in response to a recommendation in the December 2022 Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) report for the LGA that the LGA should “lead the design of a reshaped sector support and assurance framework for local government, reflecting the different needs seen across the sector now.”
6. The framework intends to provide an overview of the various elements that provide assurance of the performance of the local government sector and the way these elements fit together. This is underpinned by the sector-led improvement principles that councils are accountable locally and have collective responsibility for the overall performance of the sector.

7. A second phase of engagement with the sector on the framework draft has commenced and is set to run until the end of February. This phase will provide an opportunity for stakeholders to consider ways in which current checks and balances can be simplified or enhanced to provide greater assurance for the sector.
8. If you have any comments or feedback on the draft framework, please [share your views](#) through the consultation form.

Annual Member Peer Conference

9. The LGA's Annual Member Peer Conference was held in November 2023 in Bristol. Over 140 member peers from across the country participated in the conference which was held, for the first time, over 2 days.
10. It was held at what is a key time for local government and sector-led improvement (SLI) in the context of key developments including the establishment of the Office for Local Government (Oflog) and a series of high-profile cases concerning a small number of challenged councils.
11. The conference gave Member Peers the opportunity to consider this operating context and what this means for their work and for SLI and Corporate Peer Challenge. Peers participated in a series of development sessions covering assurance and governance, the future of SLI, people services, transformation, a session for less experienced peers and a session on 'how to have difficult conversations'.
12. Feedback from the conference has been overwhelmingly positive with 100% of respondents indicating that they were satisfied with the overall conference. The LGA is committed to taking forward the feedback from the sessions to inform the ongoing development of SLI and Corporate Peer Challenge. Continued thanks to all the Member and Officer Peers who continue to support local government through the LGA's sector support programme.

Sustainability Support Programme

13. [The Sustainability Hub](#) for the new Sustainability Support Programme has launched, offering a wide range of resources to help councils address environmental sustainability.
14. I chaired an event on "Decarbonising Transport" on 22 November. The session shared good practice examples from Cheshire West and Chester, Coventry and Cambridgeshire Councils, who are developing and delivering decarbonising

transport strategies and provision across urban and rural communities, across active travel, traditional forms of transport and public transport options.

15. Slides from the event can be viewed on [this webpage](#), alongside [the summary blog](#) from the session.
16. Councillors can now sign up to our [Sustainability Masterclasses](#) which will provide participants with a carbon literacy accreditation and the ability to make informed decisions about carbon reduction.

Sector Support Programme 2023/24

17. Our [sector support programme for 2023/24](#) continues to provide critical support and drive improvement across local government. Across the 5 themes of Governance, Leadership, Finance, Workforce and Transformation, all councils have been able to access a comprehensive support offer, shaped directly through engagement with councils, to meet their needs.
18. We continue to see high engagement in our programmes, and satisfaction from those supported. Highlights from Quarter Three include:
 - 18.1. LG Inform has received over 400,000 page views during the year to date.
 - 18.2. 6 Leadership Academy programmes have started with a total of 88 members participating in the programmes. 64 members have already completed the programme.
 - 18.3. 1822 non-councillors have engaged with the Be a Councillor campaign. We have had 1066 engagements through 189 sign ups to the Be a Councillor newsletter, 802 attendees at events, and 75 enquiries from members of the public on how to stand for election and access resources.
 - 18.4. 96 Transformation Experts have been recruited for the Transformation Experts programme.
 - 18.5. The Future for Local Government Finance event took place on the 15 November 2023 with 50 delegates attending in person - the event was fully subscribed.

Improvement Activity

Peer Challenge

19. Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) continues to be a critical element of the LGA's sector support offer to councils. To date the LGA has delivered 36 corporate and finance peer challenges, with a packed schedule of delivery planned for January – March 2024.
20. A key part of the enhanced corporate peer challenge offer is the Progress Review, and to date we have completed 35 progress reviews with many more confirmed or in final discussion for the remainder of the year.
21. The LGA remains committed to continually improving its CPC offer to ensure it is achieving the most positive impact and that it meets the needs of the sector. At the last meeting of the Improvement and Innovation Board held on 15 December 2023, members agreed to a programme of changes to strengthen Corporate Peer Challenges (CPCs) and to better demonstrate both the value they add, and the assurance they already provide to the sector.
22. Underpinning this programme of work will be a communications plan with a strong narrative around how the new CPC fits into the wider improvement and assurance framework, the robustness of the CPC process and the impact and cost efficiency of CPCs.
23. If you would like to discuss your council having a CPC please contact your [Principal Adviser](#).

Leadership

National Recruitment Campaign

24. We have launched our National Recruitment Campaign as part of the 2023/24 sector support offer, encouraging people to make a difference where they live through a career in local government.
25. The campaign arrives at a crucial point for local government, with more than 9 in 10 councils across the country experiencing staff recruitment and retention difficulties whilst demand for services continues to rise. It is vital to attract more people into the workforce.

26. I provided comment for the press release to highlight the value of a career in local government, including the wide range of challenging and rewarding roles available that deliver essential services to the communities we serve.
27. The campaign is initially being piloted in the North East of England over five weeks. The ambition is for the campaign to be expanded to the rest of the country to continue encouraging people to see the difference they can make through a local government career.
28. On the 10 January we held a launch event chaired by Cllr Graeme Miller, Chair of the Association of North East Councils (ANEC), North East Representative on the LGA Executive and Leader of Sunderland City Council. There were 82 attendees at the launch event. The event included presentations from 4 councils about how they will be using the campaign, alongside further insight into how the regional campaign will be rolled out.

LG Challenge 2024

29. The successful applicants for [Local Government Challenge 2024](#) were announced in December with officers forming a cohort from councils in London, North West, South East, South West, West Midlands, and Yorkshire & Humber.
30. The LG Challenge is an annual competition and leadership development programme for local government officers. Over six months, 10 officers take part in five real-life challenges at councils up and down the country, culminating in a final event at the [LGA's annual conference](#) in Harrogate (2-4 July), in which four finalists pitch their project proposals to delegates and a judging panel.

Local Government Disability Champions Network

31. The Local Government Disability Champions Network launched on 15 December 2023 with an online meeting Chaired by LGA Vice Chair Baroness Brinton. The Network will meet monthly and is open to anyone within local government who has a formal, or informal, role as a Disability Champion, as well as allies and external stakeholders.

Finance Support and Improvement

32. I was pleased to chair four round table discussions with senior officers to discuss research we commissioned into councils with experience of finance and governance challenges which led to either a s114 report or a capitalisation direction.

33. The discussions considered common themes identified in those councils in the lead-up to the s114 reports or capitalisation directions and considered any other relevant factors, including organisational culture and the effectiveness of member-officer relationships. A note summarising the key themes from the discussions will be published in February 2024.
34. The LGA, working with CIPFA, has successfully bid for over £600,000 additional funding from DLUHC to provide finance improvement support. The funding will support the delivery of training programmes to finance professionals and elected members and support the further development of a curriculum for s151 officers.

Publications and engagements

This section outlines the publications that have occurred since the previous Councillors' Forum including public affairs, media releases, articles in First magazine and publications on our website.

Media Releases

35. [Fulfilling a crucial role for children](#), 27 November 2023
An MJ article on the market challenges and spiking demand in Childrens Services, with particular reference to funding concerns and service costs, alongside note of the attempts to deliver progress, for which I provided comment.
36. [LGA seeks more views on how to improve assurance](#), 28 November 2023
Our press release highlighting the launch of the second phase of engagement with the sector on the Improvement and Assurance framework.
37. [Pressure for LGA peer review to be strengthened](#), 30 November 2023
An MJ article highlighting our ongoing work to strengthen the process of peer review, including comments from Cllr William Nunn and myself.
38. [North East councils pilot national recruitment campaign](#), 10 January 2024
An LGA media release on the launch of our National Recruitment campaign, which notes the value of a career in local government, for which I provided comment.

Local Government First Magazine

39. [Peer Support](#), Dated November 2023

I wrote an article for First Magazine on the Annual Member Peer Conference hosted in Bristol in November and the central role of peers in championing sector led improvement.

40. [Effective Financial Management](#), Dated January 2024

I authored an article for First Magazine on the roundtables with senior officers that I chaired, which discussed LGA-commissioned research into councils with experience of finance and governance challenges.

41. [Be a Councillor](#), Dated January 2024

I wrote an article for First Magazine on the fulfilling role of being a Councillor, in being a leader within the community to create impactful change. I note the role we all have to play in nurturing the next generation of councillors and highlight our Be a Councillor campaign.

42. [Assurance framework views needed](#), Dated January 2024

A First article on the launch of the second phase of engagement for the [Improvement and Assurance Framework](#), for which I provided comment. We are seeking the sector's views on principles of assurance and accountability, examples of good practice, and asking for ideas on how the framework can be improved until the end of February.

Publications

43. [Councillor Mentoring Handbook](#), 7 November 2023

The handbook outlines the process and value of councillor mentoring to improve the quality of political and managerial leadership. Including approaches to mentoring, the mentoring relationship, and resources for practical support.

44. [Draft Improvement and Assurance Framework](#), 28 November 2023

The draft Improvement and Assurance Framework, which provides an overview of the various elements that provide assurance of the performance of the local government sector and the way these elements fit together.

45. [Peer Induction Pack](#), 8 December 2023

Guide to introduce the role of a peer, including the Peer Charter which sets out the key expectations and requirements of being a peer. The guide provides information about the time you will need to commit, payment of expenses and the peer placement process.

46. [An introduction to the peer challenge process and the role of peers](#), 8 December 2023
An introduction to Peer Challenge, to support new LGA peers to be ready and confident to be part of an LGA peer challenge team.
47. [The LGA Cyber 360 Framework](#), 15 December 2023
A framework to provide expert guidance to local authority senior leadership and management in cyber security culture, including good practice that councils can employ to improve their cyber security posture and practices.
48. [A councillor's workbook on handling casework](#), 11 January 2024
A workbook designed to provide councillors with insight into the key skills to help you to be most effective in handling casework in your role.

Events

This covers events where Improvement and Innovation Board members have been directly involved, rather than all events delivered during this period covered by the board's remit.

49. [Finance: Leadership Essentials](#), Oct/Nov 2023
I contributed to sessions entitled "Financial Leadership in 2023 – A leader's perspective" at Finance Leadership Essentials. The programme help leaders and finance portfolio holders get to grips with the financial challenges facing their authority.
50. [Young Councillors Weekender](#) "Question Time", 18-19 November 2023
I contributed to a workshop session entitled "Question Time" on our Young Councillors Weekender. The informal session was under strict confidential terms, allowing councillors to raise questions, problems and burning issues and put them to a panel of experienced councillors to hear how they might tackle them.
51. [2023/24 Leadership Academy programmes](#)
Cllr Alan Connett, Lead Member of the Board, and Cllr Sarah Rouse, Member of the Board, have been programme co-ordinators on our 2023/24 Leadership Academy programmes.
52. [Next Generation](#), Friday 10 November 2023
I was a guest speaker for the Conservative Group on a Next Generation module. Our Next Generation programme aims to support and encourage councillors to be bold and confident political leaders, progress in your political career and be champions of local government.



Councillors' Forum

25 January 2024

Contact details

Contact officer: Helen Jenkins

Position: Head of Improvement, Coordination and Strategy and Head of Leadership

Phone no: 02076643068

Email: helen.jenkins@local.gov.uk