

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

Office for Local Government (Oflog)

1. We continue to engage with officials to ensure that the proposed work of Oflog is developed in collaboration with the sector to deliver value for Local Government and the wider public and confirm that the work complements, and does not duplicate, that which already exists.
2. In previous discussions I raised the need for a regular meeting for political leaders on Oflog. A first meeting of the Oflog Political Advisory Group took place on 6 February, chaired by Lord Morse. I was invited in my role as Chair of the Improvement and Innovation Board, alongside the LGA Chair and Group Leaders, Chairs of London Councils, DCN, CCN, SIGOMA, UCN, Key Cities Group, Core Cities Group and the M10. The advisory group will serve as a platform for regular consultation and feedback from political leaders in the sector on Oflog's development.
3. We welcomed Lord Morse (Interim Chair) and Josh Goodman (Chief Executive) of Oflog to the most recent meeting of the Improvement and Innovation Board on 21 February for a dialogue on the updated position on Oflog. The board engaged with Lord Morse and Josh Goodman in constructive discussion and provided feedback on the proposed work of the department and the potential impact on the sector.
4. There have been helpful discussions to inform the development of a shared narrative which will set out the respective and complementary roles and responsibilities of Oflog and the LGA, and how the two organisations will work collaboratively and minimise duplication, with a shared aim of supporting improvement in the sector.
5. We will also be responding to the consultation on [Oflog's draft corporate plan by 14 March](#) on behalf of the sector.

Improvement and Assurance Framework

6. The LGA is mapping the [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.”

7. The second phase of engagement with the sector (leaders and chief executives in regions, professional bodies and other stakeholders) is currently underway, due for completion in the next couple of weeks. In addition to seeking comments on the revised draft framework, this provides 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. We encourage everyone to review the [draft framework and associated materials](#) and provide comments via the [online survey](#).
9. A revised version of the framework, with associated guidance and tools for use by councils, will be considered by the Improvement and Innovation Board at its next meeting.

Peer Support Review

10. We continue our work to strengthen the Corporate Peer Challenge offer to ensure it is achieving the most positive impact, and that it meets the needs of the sector.
11. In April, we are launching our strengthened and more robust CPC offer for councils. This strengthened offer builds on the changes we've already made around stronger requirements for the publication of reports and action plans, and the requirement for councils to have a follow up CPC Progress Review and publish the follow up report no later than twelve months after the original CPC took place.
12. The planned improvements we are making include enhanced training for peers, a greater emphasis on performance, data and evidence and a stronger focus on governance and culture to reflect the current draft statutory Best Value Guidance for councils.
13. To help with the timing of CPCs, we are also introducing a detailed timetable for all councils that will highlight a timeframe window to assist them in planning for their CPC in line with the expectations set out in the draft Best Value Guidance. The expectation is for councils to have a Corporate or Finance Peer Challenge at least once every five years.

Sector Support Programme 2023/24

14. 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.

15. We continue to see high engagement in our programmes, and satisfaction from those supported. Highlights from Quarter Three include:

- 15.1. Our **National Recruitment Campaign** marketing local government as a career of choice has launched. Over 350 attendees have engaged in regional events, helping to shape the pilot campaign in the North East.
- 15.2. **Post elections support** has been provided to 111 councils, with 100% of respondents in receipt of this support satisfied with the support provided.
- 15.3. Over 2,200 councillor placements have already been provided on **training and development opportunities** through the leadership programme.
- 15.4. Applications for **NGDP Cohort 26** launched in October 2023, attracting high levels of interest with over 4,800 applicants.

Improvement Activity

Peer Challenge

16. 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 50 corporate and finance peer challenges, with further delivery scheduled during February and March 2024.

17. A key part of the enhanced corporate peer challenge offer is the Progress Review, and to date we have completed 37 progress reviews with many more confirmed or in final discussion for the remainder of the year.

18. If you would like to discuss your council having a CPC, please contact your [Principal Adviser](#).

Leadership

LG Challenge 2024

19. In December the [cohort of talented officers](#) taking part in LG Challenge 2024 were announced, and in January they completed their first challenge, hosted by Newcastle City Council. The challenge topic was "how can the council influence citizen behaviour so that residents will better follow the waste hierarchy", focusing on minimising waste production and increasing reuse and recycling. The challenge film can now be viewed on the [LG Challenge website](#).

20. The second challenge was hosted by Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council on 20-21 February and focussed on culture and local heritage. Teams were asked to create a destination marketing plan that connects three of their major

cultural sites, Dean Clough Mills, Piece Hall and Shibden Hall. The film of the second challenge is set to be released soon.

Be a Councillor campaign

21. The LGA's Be a Councillor Campaign has been working with expert partners [NALC](#), [Elect Her](#), [50:50 Parliament](#), [Shout Out UK](#) and the [Disability Policy Centre](#) on a series of events designed to encourage people from a diverse range of backgrounds to put themselves forward to be a councillor.
22. Events focus on supporting different groups of people from backgrounds who are currently under-represented in Local Government to find out more about the role of a councillor and how to go about putting yourself forward for election. We look forward to a further 7 scheduled events. For more information on the programme and upcoming events please visit the [Be a Councillor events page](#).

Councillor E-learning

23. The LGA has revised and updated its scrutiny eLearning module. The new module has been revised, taking into account changes around governance in recent years. It has been completed in advance of the 2024 elections as an opportunity for new and less experienced councillors to gain a good grounding in the principles of scrutiny when elected. It complements and reflects the workbook which was revised in the autumn of 2023.
24. To register for e-learning or to find out more, visit the [Councillor e-learning](#) webpage.

Finance

25. Following a successful bid for over £600,000 additional funding from DLUHC, the delivery of additional finance improvement support by the LGA in collaboration CIPFA is now underway. The additional funding support includes 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

26. [Welcome to a Bright Future](#), 6 February 2024

I wrote an article in the MJ about our National Graduate Development Programme (NGDP) and the benefits for councils on taking on an NGDP candidate, providing extra capacity and capability to better reflect the communities they serve.

Local Government First Magazine

27. [Local Government Recruitment](#), Dated February 2024

I wrote an article for First magazine on the launch of the National Recruitment Campaign, which is being piloted in the North East. I highlighted the ongoing issue of recruitment and retention across the sector and the value of a career in local government, captured in the campaign focus on “making a difference”.

Publications

28. [Seven principles for safer canvassing: A guide for councillors and candidates](#), 18 January 2024

A guide outlining seven principles for safer canvassing and some helpful, practical hints for canvassers.

29. [A councillor's workbook on effective councillor/ officer relationships](#), 18 January 2024

A workbook designed as an introduction to the basic principles of the councillor and officer relationship, including the roles and responsibilities, how and why tensions rise and practical advice for handling difficult situations.

30. [A councillor's workbook on facilitation and conflict resolution](#), 19 January 2024

A workbook to provide councillors with the key skills needed in relation to facilitation and conflict resolution to enable you to be effective in your councillor role.

31. [A councillor's workbook on handling complaints for service improvement](#), 23 January 2024

A workbook on the role of the councillor in handling complaints, including how to support your residents by directing them to appropriate resources and channels for complaints, and to provide representation where appropriate.

32. [A councillor's workbook on effective opposition in local government](#), 1 February 2024

A workbook produced in collaboration with Dr Stephanie Snape, New Leadership Foundation, examining effective opposition in Local Government and providing a learning and development aid to support opposition councillors in undertaking their key role in local democracy.

33. [A councillor's workbook on community leadership](#), 8 February 2024

A workbook providing insight into the key skills, approaches and tactics that make an effective ward councillor and community leader.

34. [The Path to Inclusive Footways](#), 10 February 2024

An independent report by Sustrans and Transport for All, commissioned by the LGA, which details the barriers faced by people accessing the footway and the challenges facing local authorities when making footways accessible.

35. [Early Education and Childcare Resource Pack](#), 16 February 2024

A helpful resource pack that outlines the responsibilities and role of councils in education and childcare, including insight into the funding entitlements and legislation around supporting our youngest residents.

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.

Conservative Councillors Local Government Conference, 24 February 2024

36. I was pleased to take part in a panel on Local Government Finance at the Conservative Local Government conference. I also co-led a workshop with Board member Cllr William Nunn, entitled "I'm a councillor, help me stay in here", which highlighted our Leadership Development programmes.

BBC Breakfast, 25 February 2024

37. I was interviewed live on BBC Breakfast to discuss the growing funding pressures being felt across the sector as councils across the country commence the budget setting process.

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