

Improvement and Innovation Board: Review of the Year

Sector-led improvement

1. A significant focus of our work this year was to **review the approach to sector-led improvement** in the light of the wide-ranging evaluation and political thinking in the run up to the General Election. The review was initiated at a workshop for members of the Improvement and Innovation Board and representatives of other LGA Boards last year, following which we spent some time engaging sector representatives in the development of a consultation paper to local authorities. “Taking stock: where next with sector-led improvement?” was launched on 20 January 2015 with the consultation closing on 13 March 2015.
2. There was a strong response from the sector, with a total of 160 individual responses, covering 37 per cent of authorities. When responses from representative regional bodies were taken into account, 65 per cent of authorities were covered by the responses received. In addition, responses were received from a wide range of national stakeholders, professional bodies and regional local authority representative/improvement bodies. A response was also received from the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. A full analysis of the responses was presented to our meeting in May 2015 and we are currently considering how to take the results forward in the context of a new Government.
3. The timing of the consultation coincided with the Leadership Board’s decision that sector-led improvement should be one of the LGA’s **campaigns** for 2014/15. This has led to: a revamp and greater prominence to the website content on sector-led improvement, the exploration of alternative ways of promoting the benefits of the LGA’s support offer to councils, the development of some infographics and the use of social media leading to greater engagement. A short film/podcast was also produced and launched half way through the consultation period. The film captured a range of different views on some of the key issues in the consultation with a view to promoting debate and stimulating responses. The film was hosted on the LGA YouTube channel and on the LGA website.
4. Alongside the consultation, the results from the **LGA Perceptions survey** further demonstrated the sector’s continuing support for the approach and the value attached to the support offer. More than three-fifths (63 per cent) of respondents agree that sector-led improvement is the right approach in the current context. This is consistent with results in 2013. Overall, more than four in five respondents (83 per cent) think that the support provided by the LGA for sector-led improvement is useful, increasing to 89 per cent of Leaders and Chief Executives. Four fifths of respondents (80 per cent) believe that the support and resources offered by the LGA for sector-led improvement will have a positive impact on their own authority’s capacity to monitor its own performance and continuously improve – consistent with the 2013 figures.

Innovation

5. Once again this year a key element of LGA Innovation activity has been the **Innovation Zone** at the LGA’s Annual Conference in 2015. Over 50 councils showcased their innovative approaches under the following themes: political leadership, commercialisation, digital, community action, integration and partnership working. We have also developed a searchable database of the innovative examples featured in the past two years’ Innovation Zones. The database was launched in March 2015 as part of

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the new [LGA Innovative Councils](#) website, which signposts councils to all innovative work that the LGA is involved in.

6. In addition, in an exciting new partnership with the Design Council, the LGA has agreed to part fund “Better by Design” pilots in two regions - the South West and East of England. Each cohort will have 16 participants with six to eight councils selected to participate in each regional cohort clustered around particular geographic and cross sectorial issues. Delegates will be exposed to critical design leadership content and supported to identify design-led opportunities. This programme aims to equip councils with tools and confidence in this area.

Improvement

7. We continue to deliver a large number of **peer challenges** to the sector – 132 peer challenges in total in 2014/15 across a wide range of service areas, including 38 corporate peer challenges. By March 2015, councils had contributed more than 3,200 days of senior councillor and officer time to Corporate Peer Challenge teams representing a considerable investment by the sector in its own improvement, equivalent to millions of pounds of consultancy.
8. Working through the LGA’s Lead Member Peers and Principal Advisers, we have provided **targeted support to individual councils** and groups of councils, for example: change of control support to 32 councils, bespoke peer mentoring support to 63 councils, follow-up support to 45 councils who received peer challenge and direct improvement support to 112 councils, eg around financial sustainability or where councils are facing specific improvement challenges.
9. **Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA)** has been successfully established by the LGA (though independent from it), and commenced business on 1 April 2015. It is a transitional body established to manage the current audit contracts with private sector audit firms carrying out external audits of a range of local NHS bodies, the police and local authorities. The contracts will run until at least 2017. We are currently consulting the sector on the desirability of extending the current contracts (thereby locking in estimated savings in the region of £24m a year in total) and the potential appetite for the establishment of a sector-led body that would procure external audit on authorities’ behalf when the contracts expire.

Productivity

10. Through our productivity programme we have been supporting councils with pooling resources and redesigning services, identifying the key productivity gains for local government and making sure councils deliver these savings quickly. For example:
 - 10.1. We have captured and promoted good practice of councils **sharing services**. Our interactive web-based map includes examples from 416 shared service arrangements between councils resulting in £462 million of efficiency savings.
 - 10.2. We launched the **National Procurement Strategy** and initiated a programme of work to implement it, including instituting national category plans for high spending types of work.
 - 10.3. The joint LGA/Cabinet Office **One Public Estate programme** to help local and central government asset holders rationalize assets across central and local government is proving successful. To date the programme has seen the 32 local

- authorities involved save £129 million in capital receipts and £77 million in running costs, with further long term savings expected.
- 10.4. Following the conclusion of the Adult Social Care Efficiency (ASCE) Programme with a final report and event last year, we have initiated a **Health & Social Care Integration programme** with a view to identifying the benefits of integrated working at local level.
 - 10.5. The **Productivity Expert programme** provides councils with expertise in a skills area of their choice in order to support them to deliver ambitious efficiency savings or income generation projects. Over three years, the programme has supported 54 councils across 36 projects and has contributed to £72 million in efficiency savings and income generation. The programme will support a further 20 projects this financial year.
 - 10.6. Our evaluation of the **Customer-Led Transformation programme**, which provided support to 63 projects, highlighted that the programme delivered over £331 million of financial benefit to the public and public services.

Supporting Political and Managerial Leadership

11. The LGA's refreshed leadership development support offer "Highlighting Leadership" has proved very popular - www.local.gov.uk/councillor-development. The offer provides: better targeting with clear, differentiated audiences, a more cohesive offer with new content and formats, and the flexibility to respond to changing local government agenda. Political leadership is at the heart of the refreshed offer and we have continued to support councillors through our highly acclaimed leadership programmes, with 577 councillors attending programmes in 2014/15.
12. During the year, we also introduced a number of additions to the offer including:
 - 12.1. **Tailored Community Leadership sessions at councils** run with LGA member peers and linked to the wider sector-led improvement offer on a variety of themes such as being an effective ward councillor, chairing skills, scrutiny, effective personal impact, effective meetings and licensing
 - 12.2. Community Leadership **e-learning modules** with over 2400 people signed up to the e-learning portal and over 350 councils with access to the platform - currently available are e-modules on being an effective ward councillor, facilitation and conflict resolution, and handling complaints for service improvement
 - 12.3. **a Next Generation programme for Independent Group councillors**, sitting alongside the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat programmes, all of which aim to support and encourage ambitious and talented councillors in becoming bold political leaders
 - 12.4. **new modules** on commissioning, finance and digital leadership (for the Leadership Essentials programme) and effective opposition modules (for the Focus on Leadership programme).
13. The **National Graduate Development Programme** (ngdp) continues to be successful in attracting new talent into local government. The 2014 ngdp intake (Cohort 16) is coming to the end of their first year on the programme, with 110 graduates working in over 50 councils across England and Wales. Demand from councils to take part in the 2015 intake (Cohort 17) continues to be strong, with over 120 placement requests received from over 50 councils across England and Wales.

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Transparency

14. We have continued to help councils get to grips with the implications of the Local Government Transparency Code and have published practical guidance to help authorities in implementing the Code. There were between 1600 and 2400 downloads for each of the various guidance documents during the first two months of publication. Based on our lobbying, local authorities received between £7,000 and £13,000 of new burdens funding from DCLG to pay for the ongoing cost of publications, depending on the type of authority.
15. We also secured £2.64 million between 2013 and 2015 in open data funding for authorities, via BIS' local open data Breakthrough Fund and the Cabinet Office Release of Data Fund, to help authorities release and use data in meaningful, practical ways to engage with local people and improve local services. Over 30 local authorities received grant funding to support the release and use of open data over the last two years.
16. **LG Inform**, our on-line data and benchmarking service, has increased its reach. It now has 97 per cent of councils registered and over 3,000 registered users. Since its launch, the public site has had over 93,000 visits from 53,000 unique visitors. We have continued to promote the new LG Inform to councils and to work with the sector to develop a free local benchmarking club. Now around 140 authorities are regularly taking part in this exercise, to collect and compare data that is not available elsewhere or is available quicker through LG Inform. Good progress has been made with **LG Inform Plus** (formerly known as esd-toolkit), our subscription package for local authorities offering a range of additional data tools and access to ward-level data. This met its income target for the year and brought in a small surplus.

Oversight of LGA Improvement activity

17. Members have agreed that it is important for the Improvement and Innovation Board to retain a strategic or "overarching" perspective on the improvement activity currently undertaken across LGA Boards. This will help ensure consistency with the key principles underpinning the approach to sector-led improvement and help avoid any potential duplication. We have received regular reports on the improvement activity of LGA Boards and had the opportunity, amongst others, to provide strategic input to the on-going work of the Planning Advisory Service and views on the development of the integrated Care and Health Improvement Programme for 2015/16.

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