

Sector led Improvement: half-year report to councils

This paper reports, at the half year stage, on the progress of the sector's improvement programme for 2019/20.

The report identifies some key highlights at the half year stage; some headline results from our on-going evaluation and analysis of councils' feedback; and invites views about potential support needs in 2020/21.

November 2019

Introduction and background

1. This report provides an update to councils on the delivery of the improvement offer set out in the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between MHCLG and the LGA regarding the provision of improvement support and assistance to local government for 2019/20. The report meets the requirement in the MoU to inform councils of progress in delivering the offer. The report also invites views about the shape of the improvement offer in 2020/21.
2. The MoU provides for a strong, comprehensive and effective package of support for local government. Currently the MoU is agreed on an annual basis following a process of discussion and negotiation between MHCLG and IDeA, informed by the insight gained from the LGAs on-going work in the sector and its annual programme of engagement and discussions with the sector about support requirements for the following financial year. The LGA and MHCLG will consider the benefits of moving to a longer-term MoU arrangement from 2021/22 during 2020.
3. The MoU is organised around a number of core themes, reflecting what the LGA have learnt through experience works best when it comes to supporting councils, they are: programmes to support effective political and managerial leadership; peer challenges and peer support/mentoring; practical support to help councils make efficiency savings, transform services and generate income; and helping councils deliver core outcomes (e.g. strong local economies, increased housing supply, strengthening community cohesion, place leadership etc) working with other public sector partners.
4. Each theme sets out a number of specific deliverables. MHCLG and LGA/IDeA officials meet on a quarterly basis to review progress on the basis of quarterly performance reports provided by the IDeA.

Progress in delivering the improvement offer for 2019/20

5. The table below summarises the position on the deliverables contained in the MoU as at the end of the second quarter.

	Total	Green	Amber	Red
Deliverables	55	12	43	0

6. Overall good progress has been made during the first half of the year. All targets are on target to be delivered with twelve targets already delivered. Key highlights at the half year stage include:
 - **64 of 75 councils** that changed control have received bespoke support following the biggest change following local elections in May
 - Launched the Transformation and Innovation Exchange at the LGA Annual Conference. More than 60 councils (17.5%) have now made use of the tool by the end of September
 - Tailored member and/or officer peer supported provided to 104 councils
 - **953 councillors** already booked on leadership courses and 202 have already participated in our programmes
 - Case studies and evaluation report of the Digital Channel Shift Programme published
 - **2 cohorts** of the IGNITE programme providing development for 24 chief executives underway in conjunction with SOLACE
 - Local Partnerships have continued to provide support including the RE:Fit programme and the resolution of an ongoing PFI Insurance dispute
 - **30 Heads of Service** participating in the Springboard programme for “rising stars”.

- **149 graduates** were recruited for ngdp cohort 21
- Over **40 examples** of innovation showcased at the Innovation Zone (part of the LGA Annual Conference, which took place 2-4 July 2019)
- We have provided communications support to councils on a wide variety of subjects from diversity and equality to cyber security and adult social care
- Design in Public Sector programme delivered by the Design Council launched.
- Relunched the shared services map which now identifies efficiency savings in excess of **£1.34 billion from 626 partnerships**
- **56 peer challenges** delivered to date with **22 corporate or finance peer challenges**
- CfPS have provided assistance to 30 councils on matters relating to scrutiny and council governance
- **22 councils** supported through our programme of Finance Improvement and Sustainability Advisers
- Provided key role supporting councils and MHCLG on Brexit issues which has included co-ordinating the work of the 9 regional chief executives and providing strategic communications advice directly.

Monitoring feedback and impact

7. In order to continue to refine and improve the support offer in the light of experience, the LGA evaluates the programme and monitors satisfaction/feedback and the longer-term impact of several key offers.
8. **Corporate peer challenge impact:** we surveyed councils that received a corporate peer challenge between 1 April 2018 and 31 July 2018 to assess the impact nearly a year later. We found that:
 - hundred per cent of the of respondents said that their corporate peer challenge had a positive impact on their council's performance and the delivery of their council's priorities
 - eighty-eight per cent said the corporate peer challenge had a positive impact on the council's financial planning and viability

“It has been an extremely useful "sense check" on what we are doing and how we are doing it. It highlighted areas for improvement that aligned with our own thinking and gave us some ideas around how we could make necessary improvements.” Chief Executive

“Used as a catalyst to change our planning committee. Provided external verification on changes that had been made around the council's operating model. Gave us focus needed to push through some policy changes.” Chief Executive

“We have raised our aspirations. We have been more confident in our plans and programmes. We have reappraised our risk appetite upwards.” Chief Executive

9. **Workforce support impact:** we surveyed councils that received bespoke support from the LGA's workforce team between April 2018 and March 2019 to assess the impact six months after the support concluded. We found that:
 - ninety-five per cent said the support had a positive impact on one or more of the outcome(s) they hoped to achieve
 - ninety-five per cent said the support had a positive impact on the main outcome that they hoped to achieve

“As our council is still going through significant change LGA have assisted us with job evaluation leading to establishing overall functional change.”

“Very useful advice and guidance in respect of chief executive’s appraisal process, also put us in touch with possible external facilitators for this. Contributed to making our processes more robust and transparent. Working with us to provide external mentors for most senior managers which will have a positive impact on the capabilities of our leadership.”

LGA support has resulted in the **“Resolution of potentially damaging situation in terms of reputation, impact on the council and on colleagues.”**

10. Leadership Essentials impact: we surveyed councillors several months after they had attended Leadership Essentials courses in 2018-19, to see what long term impact this had:

- all respondents (100 per cent) were very or fairly satisfied with the Leadership Essentials course they attended
- ninety-eight per cent of the respondents said attending a Leadership Essentials course had helped them improve the way they carried out their role
- forty per cent had progressed to a new role or taken on additional roles or responsibilities since attending Leadership Essentials –of which 97 per cent said their participation in the programme had a positive impact on their ability to do this

“The course has given me the confidence to ask more in-depth questions of officers and understand the roles of officers outside partners and structures.” Leadership Essentials, Children’s Services Programme

“I have looked at and changed the way that I communicate through social media. I have also considered how to change my communication style depending on the audience.” Leadership Essentials, Getting Your Message Across

“It’s easy to operate within a ‘bubble’ and see your authority as the only way to operate. Information from the course and interaction with others from fire authorities all over the UK opened my eyes to different practice some good, some bad but all valuable as a learning experience.” Leadership Essentials, Fire and Rescue

11. National Graduate Development Programme (ngdp): we surveyed graduates in cohort 19 of the programme which finished in June 2019. We found that:

- ninety-nine per cent said they felt more confident in their ability to gain a management position in local government, having participated in the ngdp
- eighty-five per cent said that the objectives they had for taking part in the ngdp were largely or fully achieved

“The ngdp has been a great experience - there was no other way which I could have learnt so much about various areas of the council and the council structure as a whole. It’s been a great opportunity and I have managed to secure a job in my host council, the relationships and knowledge I have built during the last couple of years will be invaluable as I progress my career.” National Management Trainee

“As a council, we are always looking for innovative approaches and we continue to be excited to be a part of the ngdp, as it represents the future of our sector. It equips our graduates with the leadership skills and experience necessary to excel in their careers. Both the council and the borough have benefited from their work, with each graduate playing a real part in modernising our services.” Ros Jones, Elected Mayor of Doncaster

“The sheer variety on offer through the ngdp is extremely valuable. The access to opportunities that we have through the programme can’t be overstated; I’ve managed to make connections across the council which is highly useful for the collaborative approach to work that we need when services are shrinking.” National Management Trainee

12. This work forms part of a wide-ranging evaluation of the support offer running from 2016 until 2020 as well as looking to the future in relation to how the strengths of SLI can be further enhanced in the next decade. We have already published the findings at the half way stage and the report can be found [here](#). Further work is underway, and we envisage publishing a final report in 2020.

Improvement support in 2020/21

13. The MoU with MHCLG is negotiated annually, with a view to move to a longer-term arrangement in the near future. It is important that LGA have a clear view about the sector's potential support needs so we can ensure that, subject to resources, they are provided for. We have therefore undertaken a programme of engagement with the sector. Feedback to date about the value and impact of the current offer continues to be very positive.

14. As demonstrated in the feedback above, peer challenge and support are all still highly thought of and considered to be the core of any improvement offer going forward. Leadership resources to help councillors and officers create diverse and inclusive cultures, with a focus on encouraging greater civility in public life are also at the top of councils' priorities. Indeed, in response to feedback from the sector, we have introduced new programmes in 2019/20, including:

- Audit Committee
- Being an effective cabinet member
- Building safety
- Climate emergency
- Creating better high streets and town centres
- Homelessness
- Housing
- Licensing

15. Looking ahead, councils have also continued to identify the need for support around the use of digital tools and solutions to support service delivery; building and maintaining local financial resilience; building capacity in children's and adult social services; supporting economic growth; devolution and housing.

16. Tackling climate change at a local level has increasingly become a priority for many local authorities, evidenced by declarations of climate emergency from over 260 councils and eight combined authorities. With more councils identifying the climate as a priority and requesting support in this area, an improvement offer is being developed to ensure councils are able to effectively respond to the issue.

17. Please let us know if there are additional areas where support may be required in 2020/21 by emailing matthew.hamilton@local.gov.uk or lusi.manukyan@local.gov.uk.

Accessing our support

18. A summary of the current support offer and further information are available on the LGA website: <https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/our-improvement-offer>. You can also get in touch with LGA Principal Advisers who are the LGA's focal point for discussions who would be pleased to discuss current or future improvement needs. Their contact details are also available on the LGA website: <https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/lga-principal-advisers>.