

22nd October 2021

WLGA IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME 2021-22 UPDATE

Purpose

1. To update Members on progress against the Delivery Plan for the Improvement Programme 2021-22 and seek views on future funding arrangements.

Background

2. The Improvement Programme demonstrates the shared commitment of the WLGA and Welsh Government to promoting, supporting, and resourcing sector-led improvement across local government in Wales.
3. Members endorsed the WLGA Improvement Offer 2021-22 at the Leaders' meeting on 19th March 2021, which comprised two elements:
 - A universal offer available to all councils – focused on building strong corporate capacity and capability with councils under four interdependent priorities:
 - COVID-19 Pandemic Recovery;
 - Local Democracy & Member Development;
 - Corporate Governance & Performance; and
 - Corporate Capability
 - A targeted offer for those councils who need more intensive and dedicated support to help them improve aspects of their business.

In addition, work has been undertaken to establish the team and programme.

4. Welsh Government funding is awarded annually subject to approval of the delivery plan. The delivery plan 2021-22 as outlined above was approved by Welsh Government to secure £800,000 grant funding for 2021-22. Work is currently underway to develop the draft delivery plan for 2022-23.
5. Although Welsh Government financial support is critical, funding a core team and the commissioning of specific services, sector-led improvement is founded on a commitment from senior members and professionals to 'mutual aid', the proactive offer and receipt of reciprocal peer challenge and support within and across the local government family. Local government invests significant in-kind commitment and contribution to sector-led improvement

Progress Update

6. Programme Set Up

- **Programme team:** three members of the team (out of five) were successfully appointed within quarter two, however, a third recruitment exercise is currently underway to establish full team complement. Recruitment delays have impacted on planned delivery targets and remain a risk for delivery of key priorities ahead of the May election. Feedback suggests fixed term posts (linked to the annual grant) and uncertainty over continued funding are barriers to recruitment.
- **Website Development:** the WLGA website has been updated to include details of the Improvement Programme, which is receiving hits.
- **Officer Peers:** initial discussions with local authorities suggests good support for the Improvement Programme and a willingness of Senior Officers to participate in the Peer Network. Several officers have already offered to provide informal and formal peer work already. Officer Peer recruitment is scheduled for late Autumn 2021.
- **Member Peers:** member peers are a critical part of the sector-led approach; where requested, member peers are largely identified via the LGA's political groups and some ad hoc approaches within Wales, however, a more formal approach to member peer recruitment is planned following May's elections. This approach may follow the LGA model, whereby senior peers, who are no longer elected members after an election, are engaged on an 'Associate Peer' basis for a period to ensure their expertise and experience is not lost to the sector.
- **Associate Peers:** the WLGA works with several associates who are former senior officers within local government and the wider public sector for ad hoc pieces of improvement work. A recruitment exercise to recruit additional associates to commence in quarter three. The WLGA will further consider the recruitment options for independent members to chair the new statutory Panel Performance Assessments from May 2022.

7. COVID-19 Pandemic Recovery

- Two COVID-19 Recovery & Renewal Peer Panels have been delivered via the LGA, with potential for a two more reviews to be undertaken before the end of the financial year. Positive feedback has been received on the process and the additional benefits of continued networking, intelligence sharing and ongoing support.
- Continued development and publication of good practice exchange through case studies, further work is required to reach the original targets by the end of year, which has been delayed due to stretched resources. A sector learning event is planned for late Autumn.
- Data Cymru have continued to support and deliver data collection and dissemination.

8. Local Democracy and Member Development

- Digital Citizenship report and guidance has been published to support civility in public life campaign via the LGA, WLGA, COSLA and NILGA.
- The majority of Councils have signed Diverse Council Declarations and work is ongoing with Councils to develop implementation action plans, working with partners including WENWales, EYST, Stonewall and Disability Wales.
- Provision of coaching and mentoring for senior Members has continued.
- Coordination and promotion of Be a Councillor and Diversity in Democracy campaign – including [pen-portraits and videos](#) of diverse councillors and an [e-learning module](#) for candidates on the www.beacouncillor.wales website
- Coordinating support for newly elected Members from 2022, including development of e-learning resources for new councillors, working with Councils on local, regional, and national induction and training events.
- Working with the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny on the development of the Democracy Handbook, which will replace the existing statutory guidance round democratic and governance aspects of legislation, including the new Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.
- Finalised revised protocol for Local Authorities on selection of Councillors to serve as Members on National Park Authorities.
- Provision of scrutiny support and development with three Councils.
- Work continues with Academi Wales to commission a new leadership programme for elected members post-elections.
- Governance and Audit Committee support including:
 - Developing role descriptions;
 - Development of a lay person application form template;
 - Leading a national recruitment campaign to raise awareness and direct to local recruitment pages;
 - Provision of training support to Chairs and committees; and
 - Working with CIPFA to develop Governance & Audit Committee guidance.

9. Corporate Governance & Performance

- Advice, support and knowledge sharing repository developed to support Corporate Joint Committee leads and key officers.
- Advice and support around the new statutory Self-Assessment duty, including two guidance notes developed and open to consultation. Continued support, advice and challenge provided to local authority leads. Facilitation of a workshop to share approaches and best practice is scheduled for Autumn 2021.
- Draft Panel Performance Assessment (PPA) methodology produced. The team are establishing a working group of local authority officers to co-produce, with an initial meeting expected in November. The team are in discussion with one local authority to host a pilot PPA.
- Commissioned (with Lawyers in Local Government) an update of the model constitution and production of a constitution guide following the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, work continuing during quarter 3.
- Data Cymru commissioned to co-develop a draft set of core performance measures for Welsh Local Government for member approval.

10. Corporate Capability

- Data Cymru has identified three initial dashboards (Poverty, Decarbonisation and Well-being of Future Generations Act) and are working with Councils on development.
- Data Cymru has identified 12 cohorts to receive DataBasics training, ongoing discussions with local authorities to agree delivery dates with authorities juggling competing demands.
- Work is ongoing to promote and engage with local authorities to use OpenDataWales.
- Work commencing with the SOLACE, Society of Welsh Treasurers and HR Directors Network to identify and develop good practice case studies, webinars and 'toolbox talks' focused on learning on key topics. It is anticipated that targets will be met by 31st March 2022.
- Work commencing with SOLACE and HR Directors Network to scope additional support needs, including developing an approach to Chief Executive Appraisal and support for new chief executives.
- Remote peer support around governance has been provided to two local authorities.

11. Targeted Improvement

- Work has been undertaken or is ongoing with three Councils to provide dedicated support in relation to key corporate and service challenges and/or organisational risk.

Longer-term Planning and Funding

12. Work has commenced to strengthen the programme framework methodology, including the establishment of benefits realisation assessment to support decision making, outcome monitoring, mapping all improvement offers to avoid duplication and assist with sign-posting, and stakeholder and risk management development. This will enhance transparency and accountability in future years when demand for support is expected to increase.
13. As part of an induction process, the Head of the Improvement Programme is currently having introductory meetings with local authority chief executives and engaging with professional networks to raise awareness of the programme and identify support needs for 2022-23 and beyond. The Head of the Improvement Programme will seek to engage with leaders on an individual basis following Executive Board.
14. The outcome of these engagements along with horizon scanning of Audit Wales and other inspection or regulatory reports, emerging trends and issues, will form the basis of the draft delivery plan 2022-23. This draft plan will be considered by members in due course.
15. Members previously discussed the Welsh Government's commitment to improvement funding of £800,000 awarded on an annual basis. Although an in-

principle commitment to sector-led commitment has been given in the longer-term, this annual approach to grant funding does not provide security and has impacted directly on staff recruitment and delivery of the current plan.

16. The WLGA also receives grant funding of £530,000 for the Chief Digital Officer and team and the Spokesperson for Equalities, Anti-Poverty and Migration has recently raised the need for equalities support through the WLGA with Minister for Social Justice.
17. Although corporate improvement support funding is critical and welcome, and the WLGA also delivers a waste improvement programme through Welsh Government funding, there is limited resource or investment in core service improvement through the WLGA in areas such as education and social care.
18. The WLGA receives several other grant streams for specific project work, with constructive discussions ongoing with one funding department in Welsh Government regarding longer-term, multi-annual funding for a particular programme team. Some activities, including elements of Data Cymru's work, the food in schools programme and LGA Workforce Support are funded through an RSG top-slice.
19. Members may wish to discuss options for longer-term more sustainable funding of improvement support with the Minister for Finance and Local Government. Options include combining the improvement grant, digital grant and proposed support for equalities and agreeing grant term of longer than 12 months, or whether the combined grant or a proportion of the grant could be transferred as a new top-slice into the 2022-23 settlement to provide a core digital and improvement capacity within the WLGA, possibly supplemented by an annual grant submission for specific project funding.

Recommendations

20. Members are asked to:

- 20.1 Consider the Improvement Programme progress report; and**
- 20.2 Provide views on an approach to the longer-term funding of sector-led improvement and support (paragraphs 15-19)**

Report cleared by Cllr Hugh Evans, WLGA Spokesperson for Improvement

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