



To: Group leaders and LGA Members

From: Claire Holloway, Programme Director for Development

Title: **RESPONDING TO THE INDEPENDENT COMMISSION AND RAISING OUR GAME**

Purpose: Update for information/discussion

Date: 2 May 2007

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- To update Members on progress in responding to the findings of the Best Commission and the emerging priorities arising from Raising Our Game
- To outline the process for taking the combined programme forward to action

The Independent Commission

1. The Best Commission reported its findings on 30 March 2007. The report included 18 separate recommendations broadly built around 5 key improvement themes.
 - 1.1 Reconnecting with member authorities
 - 1.2 Enhancing leadership, lobbying and influencing
 - 1.3 Improving the reputation of local government
 - 1.4 Improving local political representation
 - 1.5 Streamlining the LGA family

Annexe 1 sets out an initial response to the Best recommendations.

Raising our Game

2. In parallel over the past 4 months the LGA has initiated a series of events across the country, targeting leaders, chief executives and other key representatives of member councils. These include:-
 - Stakeholder events at Local Government House on 25 January and 26 February
 - 24 hour event in Warwick on 8& 9 February
 - Series of working lunches/dinners with Chief Executives and leaders in Manchester, Leeds, London, Bristol and Birmingham
 - Discussions with North East Chief Executives
3. Feedback from these has underlined strongly the need for the LGA to pro-actively re-engage with its membership and to become “enmeshed” in the sector. Four priority themes have emerged for action by the LGA with the sector.

- 2.1 Partnerships and places
- 2.2 Politics and representation
- 2.3 Improvement and innovation
- 2.4 Reputation

The Prospectus

4. The next step is to bring together the key findings from Best and Raising our Game under a single Prospectus, setting out the key opportunities and challenges over the next 2 years and the priorities for action. Subject to the views of the Executive on 17 May, the Prospectus will be published in late May and widely circulated to member authorities and stakeholders for comment, prior to presentation to the General Assembly on 3 July.
5. The action plan forms the basis of an integrated implementation programme comprising 7 key projects which together cover all the individual actions arising from Best and Raising our Game. Each will be led by a Director supported by a project team and reporting to a Programme Board. Depending on the topic, project teams may be made up of any combination of LGA staff, partners, Members and representatives from member councils. Further details and timescales for implementation will be circulated in due course.

Claire Holloway
Programme Director for Development
2 May 2007

ANNEXE 1 - INITIAL RESPONSE TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE INDEPENDENT COMMISSION

No.	Recommendation	Initial response
1	Recognise importance of and support role of LGA chairman, group leaders and those leading in key policy areas. These are critical roles on behalf of the sector – needs to be a clear package encompassing definition of role, support personal commitment, standards, profile, remuneration, appraisal and turnover that reflects this	<p>Recommendation relates primarily to the way that political groups and Independents nominate or elect Members to LGA leadership positions, and to the subsequent relationship between them.</p> <p>The LGA:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strongly encourages all groups to adopt the recommendations and will develop templates and protocols for the groups to consider. • Will commission an Independent Panel to advise on future support and remuneration. • Believes it is important to re-affirm the nature of LGA political leadership, not as led by a particular party but as is the only body active in national politics representing a cross party consensus in all that it does. It considers this to be a major asset. • Proposes to create a Leaders Council of serving council leaders reflecting political proportionality, to act as strategic adviser to the LGA leadership. Terms of reference are being prepared for consultation.
2	Endorse role of Central-Local Partnership, with support from small number of CLP Sub-groups, as focal point for discussion at highest level of central and local government	<p>Agreed.</p> <p>The LGA will seek the support of the new Prime Minister for the Central-Local Partnership at the earliest opportunity</p>
3	Formally commission rolling set of reference sites in key policy areas that can be deployed in wider lobbying efforts of sector.	<p>Agreed in principle.</p> <p>The issue is more complex than the recommendation would imply. The LGA will:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenge the sector to recognise that ‘demonstration is the best form of advocacy’. • Encourage councils to pay more attention to promoting their work with candour and integrity to help build support for our arguments. • Work with the IDeA and councils to establish a rolling register of councils demonstrating best practice in all key policy areas.
4	Provide strong, more consistent profile for regular, standard briefing for Parliamentarians, which local authorities can use in communicating with their MPs.	<p>Agreed.</p> <p>Will be implemented as part of the revisions to the LGA’s public affairs function.</p>

5	Establish a Sounding Board made up of elected members, drawn primarily from portfolio holders in individual authorities in each region, to support work in each main theme, policy or service area that the LGA chooses. Sounding Boards would meet together, two or three times a year, very often outside of London.	The LGA supports the essence of recommendations 4,5,6 but proposes an alternative solution. The LGA
6	A smaller number (3-4) of councillors from each Sounding Board form a network of LGA Ambassadors who, in addition to full meetings of Sounding Boards, work in smaller groups and individually as representatives of local government in each of the relevant policy areas with media, government and a range of partners. They would be two-way channels of communication between the LGA nationally and member councils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposes to refocus the existing LGA Boards to achieve the objectives rather than create new sounding boards. The Boards will work to agreed terms of reference and protocols of practice intended to encourage an external focus and avoid a London centric approach. Will encourage Portfolio Holders to put themselves forward for election to boards, recognising that political proportionality make it difficult to impose. Proposes that the role of Ambassador can be undertaken to an extent by all Board members but will be specifically incorporated into the terms for reference for the group spokespersons on each Board, who together can act as the smaller group. Emphasises that the role of Ambassadors will need to take account of Party Political allegiances. Proposes to incorporate the role of Portfolio Leader in the terms of reference for the Board Chairs. All Board Chairs would continue to serve on the LGA Executive and be major players in the overall leadership of the Association and sector.
7	Appoint a Portfolio Leader for each of the main policy or service areas it chooses. Portfolio Leaders would, working with the LGA Chairman and Executive, be the key point of executive authority and the LGA national spokesperson in that area. They would also chair meetings of the relevant Sounding Board and convene contributions from the network of Ambassadors.	
8	Recruit a small but more formally appointed network of LGA Advisers to work with Portfolio Leaders, Ambassadors and their Sounding Boards and in the different policy and subject areas.	Agreed but in a modified form. Within the sector there is managerial/professional expertise amongst officers and political expertise amongst portfolio holders. Increasingly political and managerial/professional leaderships work together. The LGA

9	Convene a Policy and Public Affairs Forum, perhaps on a quarterly basis, at which organisations primarily within the sector such as special interest groups, groupings of councils, professional associations and think tanks – have an opportunity to share forward work plans around lobbying government and identify where greater efficiency and effectiveness can be secured by closer alignment of messages and activity.	Agreed.
10	The LGA and central bodies place a high priority on resourcing a sustained approach to communicating the value of local government, nationally as well as in supporting councils locally, as a central plank in the LGA’s ‘Raising Our Game’ initiative.	<p>Agreed in principle.</p> <p>The LGA will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider implementation and its capacity and cost implications within the development of the LGA and central bodies strategic plan. • Work with member councils to reinvigorate the work on reputation
11	Convene a National Strategic Partnerships that bring together partners, including LGA Ambassadors or Advisers or Vice Presidents, and senior figures from partnership organisations to explore, jointly, how national action can help support effective local partnership working	Agreed. Discussions already underway with partners and potential participants to build support for the proposal and develop plans for its implementation.
12	Establish an LGA Futures capacity to organise and publish a series of think pieces, consistently branded, dealing with each of the major long-term challenges facing local public services.	<p>Agreed in principle, subject to constraint on capacity and resource. Political groups will need to support this approach and recognise that speeches, publications and media lines contributing to the debate may not reflect their own views.</p> <p>The LGA will:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek to release resource and capacity for this new area of activity through improved ways of working. • Develop protocols for branding think pieces on complex topics that do not necessarily reflect a consensus view
13	Play a leading part alongside others, including political parties, in recruiting and supporting new generations of able, representative people to serve as councillors.	<p>Agreed.</p> <p>The LGA will:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate into wider work on Politics & Representation with the political parties over the next 1-2 years.

14	With central bodies, take a leading role in supporting poorer performers to improve, challenging moderate performers and helping excellent performers to excel further and to demonstrate the wider value of high performing local government to public service	<p>Agreed.</p> <p>The LGA will:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate into wider programme of work on Innovation and Improvement over the next 1-2 years. • Link work to work on National Improvement Strategy
15	Maintain the strategic overview for the whole Group and act as the commissioner of activity undertaken by the central bodies. This approach can follow the model of the Group structure used in other settings, with separately constituted bodies being part of a single group led by the LGA.	<p>Recommendations 15, 16, 17, 18 relate to the LGA's role in relation to the family of central bodies. Agreed in principle.</p> <p>The LGA:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Believes that developing its role as the 'commissioner of activity undertaken by the central bodies' coupled with the general strengthening of 'the family' in accordance with group practice will necessitate some changes to the LGA's own governance arrangements. For example the commissioning role may perhaps best be performed by the Group Leaders through the Executive. • Believes that the recommendations on the Improvement Board have implications for other Boards and Panels, most notably the Resources Panel.
16	Reconfigure the LGA Improvement Board as the focal point for commissioning from central bodies, approving business plans and holding them to account for performance. Individual bodies to retain their boards for internal governance and expert input; Improvement Board to set overall direction and operating parameters on behalf of the wider LGA Group.	
17	IDeA Regional Associates be deployed as a resource on behalf of the national local government family, including the LGA, to strengthen the alignment between the national bodies and individual councils.	<p>Agreed. This is a welcome innovation which needs to be considered alongside their other responsibilities of the Regional Associates. The LGA:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcomes the proposition that there should be a single point of access between councils in the regions and is seeking the advice of the Regional Associates and IDeA Directors
18	Consider more prominent branding of improvement and support activities in a way that identifies them more clearly with the LGA and is more easily understood by councils.	<p>Agreed.</p> <p>It follows logically that strengthening the LGA family must be communicated with clarity and purpose. However this must be done in a way that builds on existing brand recognition as well as communicating the new message about the family.</p>