

LGA Priorities & Work Programmes – Decisions and Actions Required

Decisions

1. *This paper provides a framework to shape consideration of priorities by the Executive and the Boards during their September meetings, so that a corporate work programme can be formulated.*

Actions Required

2. *The Executive and Boards are asked to:-*
 - *Consider the issues raised in this paper*
 - *Develop practical proposals on how the Executive and Board will take forward the framework set by the Prospectus with particular emphasis on developing and strengthening relations with member councils*
 - *Debate the key priorities for the year ahead for inclusion in the LGA corporate priority programme*
 - *Report their conclusions and recommendations at the meeting for Board and Panel spokespeople on 11 October 2007.*

Action by: *Executive*
All Boards

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LGA Priorities & Work Programmes

Summary

1. *At their away day on 15th August Group Leaders and office holders reflected on the prime issues and challenges facing the Association following the adoption by the General Assembly in July of the Prospectus and the LGA's response to the Best Commission. As a result, the chairman, group heads and office holders wish to lead an executive discussion which highlights key areas for the Executive and Boards to consider during their first round of meetings in September, prior to a further substantive discussion by the Executive and Board spokespeople in October.*

Background

2. *Over the past 10 years the LGA has campaigned consistently on the basis that better outcomes for people and communities would be achieved more quickly if councils were given greater powers, and community leadership would be more meaningful if the regulatory burden was reduced. It is a feature of government policy statements in recent weeks that this argument has been implicitly accepted. Taken together with the Local Government Bill now passing through Parliament, the LGA can reasonably claim to have made a substantial contribution to providing real opportunities for councils.*

The case for a new approach

Shifting our emphasis

3. *If we are to stay ahead and maintain a reputation for competence and effectiveness we must recognise that councils will now be expected to succeed in the roles they have sought, and accept that some are not yet equipped to do so. For the LGA this should mean continuing to shift our emphasis from lobbying for changes in government's approach to ensuring that local government takes the opportunities it has been given through effective performance and delivery. This will need concerted and sustained effort from the LGA and Central Bodies working together to support councils.*

The Prospectus

4. *On 3rd July the General Assembly endorsed the Prospectus as the LGA's strategy to underpin its work programme for the next three years, and with it the LGA's response to the recommendations of the Independent Commission. A copy of recommendations 5-8, which relate to the way that the Boards and other member structures operate, is set out in **annex 1**, along with our response.*
5. *In the Prospectus we commit to improving our representation of the sector by visibly strengthening the ways in which we listen to and communicate with our member councils. Many of the Prospectus themes – improvement and innovation, place and partnership, reputation, reinvigorating local democracy - relate to work the Boards have been doing in their service and policy areas, but there is further scope to bring together the LGA's corporate priorities and those of the individual Boards.*

6. *Group Leaders and office holders have reaffirmed the importance of the Prospectus as our blueprint for tackling the challenges ahead and ensuring that the sector is equipped and able to deliver on its promises. This is the first time that the Boards have had an opportunity to consider in further detail how they will respond within their own work programmes.*

Making the best of our resources

7. *The LGA is a small organisation for the breadth of its role and interests. Depending on the outcomes of local government restructuring it may become smaller in the future. If we are to maintain our profile and influence and achieve our strategy within fixed or reduced resources, it is important that the Boards and the Executive work closely together to prioritise the work of the LGA and make best use of the expertise of officers and advisers. This challenge applies equally to the work of the other central bodies.*

Issues to discuss

- 8 *With this as the backdrop, the Executive, Boards and panels are invited to consider the following questions at their September meetings:-*
 - 8.1 *Traditionally the LGA's member bodies have maintained a primary focus on policy. How can they also become a focus for performance issues? How should this impact on the way that the Board operates, and what would it need to fulfil this role effectively?*
 - 8.2 *How effective are the Boards' existing mechanisms for engaging with and drawing on the wider experience of Members and officers in councils and in other networks.*
 - 8.3 *What are the key issues for Board over the coming 12-months that should be included in the LGA's corporate priorities? How well do these align with the main themes set out in the Prospectus?*
- 9 *A list of questions that Boards might find useful to shape their discussions on their future ways of working of is included at **annexe 2**. A first draft set of corporate priorities, developed as a starting point for discussion, is attached at **annexe 3**.*
- 10 *The outcomes of the Board discussions will be brought together at a meeting of the spokespeople of all LGA and family boards and panels, scheduled for 11 October.*

Conclusion

- 11 *The LGA is entering a new era, with many of our arguments for greater powers and responsibilities seemingly accepted, and a clear framework for future working set by Best and the Prospectus. The LGA's reputation, and the reputation of the sector as a whole, will now hang on how well councils perform in their new roles and how successful they are in achieving better outcomes for people and communities. We need to take action now to prove to member councils that we have responded to their feedback, and that the LGA is equipped and ready to represent the sector as it moves forward.*

Implications for Wales

- 12 *As part of the process of deepening and strengthening member relationships, further links must be made with the WLGA to explore these issues, primarily in relation to non-devolved matters.*

Financial/Resource Implications

- 13 *The LGA's resources are finite and very likely decreasing. In thinking about their priorities, Boards need to be mindful that moving into new areas will require scaling back in others if efforts are not to become diffuse and under resourced. Once agreed, corporate priorities must be reflected in the priority resource allocations for the LGA as the revenue budget for 2008/9 is formulated and presented to the General Assembly in December.*

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Extract from the LGA's response to the conclusions and recommendations of the Independent Commission

Recommendation 5

The establishment of 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.

Recommendation 6

A smaller number of councillors from each Sounding Board – three to four - form a network of LGA Ambassadors who, in addition to full meetings of Sounding Boards, should 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.

Recommendation 7

The LGA appoint a Portfolio Leader for each of the main policy or service areas it chooses. These Portfolio Leaders would, working with the LGA Chairman and Executive, be the key point of executive authority and the LGA national spokesperson in the relevant area. They would also chair meetings of the relevant Sounding Board and convene contributions from the network or Ambassadors.

The LGA supports fully the objectives that lie behind recommendations 5,6 and 7 but proposes an alternative approach to meet those objectives.

The LGA:

- *Proposes to refocus the existing LGA boards rather than create new sounding boards. The refocused boards will work to agreed terms of reference and protocols designed to encourage a strong external focus and avoid a London centric approach;*
- *Will encourage portfolio holders to put themselves forward for election to boards, within the rules adopted by each of the political groups;*
- *Proposes that the role of ambassador can be undertaken to an extent by all board members. However, this role will be specifically incorporated into the terms for reference for the group spokespersons on each board, who together can act as the group of ambassadors envisaged in the recommendation;*
- *Emphasises that the role of ambassadors will need to take account of party political allegiances; and*
- *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 of the sector.*

Recommendation 8

A small but more formally appointed network of LGA advisers be recruited to work with Portfolio Leaders, Ambassadors and their Sounding Boards and in the different policy and subject areas

The LGA broadly agrees with the recommendation but proposes a modified approach. Within the sector there is managerial and professional expertise amongst officers and political expertise amongst portfolio holders. Increasingly political and managerial/professional leaderships work together.

The LGA:

- Proposes to reflect this by creating advisory networks made up of both councillors and officers;*
- Emphasises that in many cases these can be built from existing networks or processes that the LGA or central bodies already support;*
- Will strongly encourage advisor networks to operate predominately virtually, with an emphasis on two-way communications; and*
- Will delegate responsibility for creating and using networks to board chairs and relevant programme directors, with a target date of September 2007.*

Responding to the Best Commission findings – refocusing the Boards

Boards may wish to use the following questions as a starting point to help shape their discussions.

- *What has been the Board's greatest success over the past 3 years?*
- *What would a change in emphasis from lobbying to performance and delivery mean for the Board and the way it works?*
- *If the Board takes a stronger role on performance, where might that sit on the spectrum between individual councils known to need support and encouragement to councils generally to innovate and continuously improve?*
- *What could the Board do to be more outward-looking and less London-centric?*
- *Does the Board need to meet for 3 hours in Local Government House six times a year? Might it be more useful or productive to meet less frequently but for longer – for example one or two whole day meetings per year?*
- *Are the existing sub-groups the right ones? Do they need to be rearranged and refocused in the light of new and emerging priorities?*
- *Could the Board make more use of time-limited task groups to investigate specific issues and develop proposals?*
- *How could the Board draw in knowledge and expertise from the wider sector to inform its discussions and policy development?*
- *How could the Board get other member councils to take part in discussions and contribute to policy development?*
- *How could the board work with members of other boards on cross-cutting issues?*
- *How could you improve communication from the Board to the wider sector?*
- *Could individual Board members take on a regional responsibility and visit councils/regional LGA's to update them on the work of the Board and to engage them in the debate?*
- *If individual members were to take on a wider role in that way, what support might they need – for example a standard presentation to take with them to the councils they visit?*

LGA Corporate Priorities 2007/2008

Draft set as a starting point for discussion

Priority	Lead
“Raising our Game” - implementing Best and the Prospectus	<i>Group Leaders/Executive</i>
<i>Reconnecting with member councils</i>	<i>Executive & all Boards</i>
<i>Influence & reputation</i>	<i>Executive</i>
<i>Politics & Representation</i>	<i>Executive</i>
<i>Place & Partnerships</i>	<i>Executive</i>
<i>Improvement & Innovation</i>	<i>Improvement Board</i>
<i>The LGA Family</i>	<i>Improvement Board</i>
<i>Realising the potential of the local government workforce</i>	<i>HR Panel</i>
Policy programme – priority issues currently identified	
<i>CSR 2007</i>	<i>Executive</i>
<i>Constitutional offer</i>	<i>Executive</i>
<i>Local government restructuring</i>	<i>Executive</i>
<i>Environmental leadership</i>	<i>Environment</i>
<i>Waste</i>	<i>Environment</i>
<i>Housing</i>	<i>Environment</i>
<i>Health commission</i>	<i>Community wellbeing</i>
<i>Adult social care & well-being</i>	<i>Community wellbeing</i>
<i>Youth</i>	<i>Children & Young People</i>
<i>Cohesion</i>	<i>Safer communities</i>
<i>Community safety</i>	<i>Safer communities</i>
<i>Economic devolution</i>	<i>Regeneration & transport</i>
<i>Transport</i>	<i>Regeneration & transport</i>
<i>Concessionary fares</i>	<i>Regeneration & transport</i>
<i>Olympics</i>	<i>Culture, tourism & sport</i>