

Improvement Programme Board – report from Cllr David Parsons CBE (Chairman)

1. The membership of the Board for the forthcoming year has changed substantially with five new members, two of whom are new Deputy Chairs, Cllr Ruth Cadbury and Cllr Jeremy Webb. The new Programme Board will provide strategic oversight of all the LG Group's policy and improvement activity in relation to councils improving their performance and productivity. It will support councils so that they are equipped for the devolution of power from central government – in line with the LG Group priorities. In doing so it will work closely with the other Programme Boards on the performance of the sector in their subject areas and the arrangements they are putting in place to provide improvement support.
2. Since its inception, the Improvement Board has been at the heart of the LG Group's work to secure a new relationship between central and local government, so that councils can address the priorities of their communities. The Board has been the driving force behind the Local Government Association's call to create a strong framework for supporting improvement and efficiency which is owned and advanced by local government with its partners. Working together across the Group, good progress has been made. But at a time when the financial pressure on councils continues to grow, there is a need to address how to step up that call for local government to take greater control of its own improvement.
3. The discussion at the Board meeting on 9 September will focus on the **place based productivity programme**, which was launched on 24 June 2010 by the Chairman, Baroness Eaton at a roundtable meeting attended by the Secretary of State Eric Pickles MP and local government minister Baroness Hanham. Following consultation with member councils, nine work streams have been identified. The work streams are supported by members and lead officers from the sector, including the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships (RIEPs) and will demonstrate ways of working and develop tools for councils to use. They will be reporting to the LG Group Improvement Programme Board and other member boards so that recommendations can be made by local government to Ministers on changes needed that stand in the way of councils and their partners delivering greater efficiencies.
4. The work streams are:
 - 4.1 Procurement, capital and shared assets
 - 4.2 Shared services across areas, tiers and partnerships
 - 4.3 Data and transparency

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- 4.4 Adult social care
 - 4.5 Children's services
 - 4.6 Shaping markets and new models for service delivery
 - 4.7 Democratic Leadership
 - 4.8 Workforce and Skills
 - 4.9 Tackling Central Government Barriers and Burdens
5. A joint LG Group and CLG steering group has been established with political oversight provided by the Improvement Programme Board. Members will have the opportunity for a detailed discussion to ensure that the work is aligned with the Group's wider offer of place based improvement.
6. The new Coalition Government has acted quickly to reshape the approach to inspection and assessment of local public services. It is clear that the Government is thinking radically about future arrangements for holding local public services to account. In addition to the abolition of CAA and the Audit Commission it has also dismantled many of the other key elements of the previous Government's "new performance framework" including Public Service Agreements, removed a number of national indicators, abolished the Place Survey and announced its intention to abolish the Government Offices for the regions.
7. The extent of the changes that have taken place so far provide an opportunity to review and further develop the Group's proposals on the future of assessment and inspection, spelling out a more radical and ambitious approach to **sector self regulation** and the role of the LGA group, with a view to shaping the nature of any new arrangements to be introduced with effect from April 2011.. The Board will be discussing proposals for further consultation with member councils and RIEPs. Our work on *Freedom to Lead* earlier in the year showed that there is real desire amongst the local government community for taking improvement to a new level. Local government and our improvement bodies want to be able to facilitate the delivery of significant and timely capacity to turn things around, corporately or at a service level, when there are serious failings in high risk areas. Key to this change will be the willingness of the local government sector to collaborate to support councils through sharing knowledge, peer challenge, providing councillor and officer peer support and benchmarking against each other.