

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

1. The new coalition Government has acted quickly to reshape the approach to inspection and assessment of local public services. The extent of the changes that have taken place provide an opportunity to review and further develop the Local Government Group's proposals to put assessment and improvement in the hands of councils, individually and collectively. The Board agreed at our meeting last month to set out our proposals for a sector-owned approach for consultation. The starting point for sensible reform must be that councils are responsible for their own performance and for the delivery of improved outcomes for their residents. They are accountable to local communities – not Government or the Inspectorates.
2. Building on councils' responses to our earlier 'Freedom to Lead' campaign, the proposals in the consultation are designed to complement the steps already made by the coalition Government to promote localism, transparency and an increased role for local people in running their own affairs. They also provide the opportunity to make to make substantial savings in public expenditure by further reducing the weight of inspection and assessment on localities. In summary the proposals involve:
 - 2.1 Strengthening accountability through transparency, with councils and partners making on-going performance information available to the public in ways that they can understand and use;
 - 2.2 Annual reports from the council and partners to local people about the quality of life and services in their areas;
 - 2.3 Robust peer challenge – involving local people and the business and voluntary sectors; and
 - 2.4 a commitment from the sector to manage the risk of underperformance by putting in place an early warning system which would enable us to identify councils facing performance challenges at an early stage so that support can be provided and service failure avoided.
3. These proposals would enable reductions in reporting and inspection to be made, releasing resources for front line services. Statutory financial audit would continue, providing reassurance around financial resilience, value for money, probity and the reliability of local performance data. The consultation paper '**Sector self-regulation and improvement**' sets out a number of questions on which views are sought and it has been circulated widely to leaders of our member councils and

other key stakeholders . Views have been invited by **1st November 2010** to sector.improvement@local.gov.uk.

4. The Board is overseeing **the place based productivity programme** – a new initiative, led by both councillor and officer ‘productivity champions’. It will help us all to learn from tried and tested methods in the short term, as well as looking to develop radically different models for delivering collaborative services in the future which improve outcomes and save money. The place based productivity programme is led by local government itself and will identify existing good practice across nine workstreams including procurement, capital and shared assets, children’s and adult services and new models of service delivery.
5. After the Spending Review is published, the work already will be focused on helping councils deal with the scale of the challenge ahead. Political leadership and insight will be crucial to this programme if the barriers to identifying and implementing both quick wins and transformational change are to be overcome. Each strand of the programme therefore has a member champion, whose role will vary according to the nature of their strand of work. Strong political oversight will ensure that the work programme informs and engages with councillors across the country. A series of events are taking place and a national conference will take place on 3 December.
6. The work underway on productivity will help prepare the ground for **place-based, local budgets**, which would enable councils and their partners to pool budgets, reduce costs and deliver better outcomes for local people. The case for local budgets has been set out in an LGA White Paper entitled: *‘Local budgets – building the big society from the neighbourhood up’*. The paper spells out how the Government’s Spending Review can cut bureaucracy and waste by giving people real control over public services in their area. It argues that local decision-making and accountability for frontline services from probation to health and social care, through a system of local budgets, can improve public services while cutting costs. The paper has been well received. Communities Secretary Eric Pickles MP, in his speech to the Conservative Party Conference, indicated that the government will allow councils to pool the budgets across the public sector - social services, care, housing and health improvement, and reward councils for delivering results and preventing social breakdown.

Contact officer: Liz Hobson

Position: Business Manager

Phone no: 020 7664 3229

E-mail: liz.hobson@local.gov.uk