

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

1. The January meeting of the Improvement Programme Board was held in County Hall in Preston, thanks to the hospitality of Lancashire County Council. Board members welcomed the opportunity of meeting outside London and engaging with councils in the North West. A number of council leaders attended a meeting in the afternoon to discuss the challenges they face and what the Local Government Group could do to support them. Top of the list were concerns about the local economy and the cost of delivering services in the current economic climate, supporting local transport and improving employment opportunities. The points raised are being followed up so that we can ensure that the LG Group is doing as much as we can to address concerns through our lobbying and improvement work.
2. Following consideration by the LG Group Exec on 13 January the Improvement Programme Board are finalising the LG Group proposals on **sector-led self regulation and improvement** which have been developed in consultation with member councils. The overall approach remains the same – councils are responsible for their own performance; councils are accountable locally to their communities, not to Government and the Inspectorates; councils have collective responsibility for the performance of the sector as a whole – and the role of the LG Group is to support councils by making the necessary tools available for them to use, if they wish to.
3. Our proposition will provide full details of the tools that we will be making available to councils, including peer challenge and support, Knowledge Hub, leadership support, and local assessment tools. The Board supported the proposal that the tools should be available free of charge as a core part of the LG Group offer to the sector. Work is continuing with councils to shape the tools for the sector to use. Preparations are underway to arrange a national launch of the new approach to self-regulation for implementation in April 2011.
4. Phase One of the **local productivity programme** has delivered an ambitious array of practical help in a short time-scale. This has included identifying procurement gains, mapping best practice, developing 'how-to' guides and creating the basis for councils to compare productivity information. An online library of productivity opportunities is available on the productivity pages of the LG Group website and every council is being encouraged to use them to test their own performance and practice.

5. Shaping the next phase of the local productivity programme will require strong political direction and workshops for members are being organised on three themes to help scope the work. The proposed themes for phase two are:
 - 5.1 Market management, purchasing and assets – exploring the potential for further savings from scaled up procurement;
 - 5.2 Future ways of working programme – exploring a range of new ways of working such as integrated management, cluster authorities, and transitions to mutual and employee led providers;
 - 5.3 Children, adults and families – speeding up the transition to new user pathways and delivery models.
6. The LGA has called for the **Audit Commission** to give back the surplus funds it has amassed from charging councils for audit and inspection. Under proposals set out in the Audit Commission's consultation on its proposed work programme and fee structure, the Commission is planning to offer a rebate on the 2010/11 fees paid by councils. District councils will get back 1.5 per cent of their fee, while single tier and county councils will receive a 3.5 per cent rebate. Further reductions are proposed for 2011/12. However, the size of the rebate has so far been limited due to the cost of winding down CAA and abolishing the Commission. We want that cost to be met by central government, and councils to get a full rebate of the £26.8m surplus the Audit Commission holds from charging councils for audits and inspections.
7. The Local Government Group Annual Improvement and Innovation conference "**Delivering public services in challenging times**" is being held on Tuesday 22 March 2011, at the Leeds Hilton Hotel. The event will provide a real opportunity to debate the current issues of public service reform and get to grips with important topics of transparency, sector led regulation and productivity. Specific workshops will be organised for **members** and we have a limited number of places available for LGA member councillors at a specially discounted rate. Further details are available here <http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/events/display-event.do?id=15663222>
8. The next Board meeting will be held in Leeds to coincide with the conference. Members will be discussing a report on the improvement activity of all the Programme Boards.

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