

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

1. The Board took the opportunity of meeting in Leeds in March to visit examples of improvement underway in the City Council. Board members visited the Reginald Centre in Chapeltown which provides integrated services with the NHS, in an area of the city that previously lacked a one-stop shop. Members also visited the Scott Hall Independent Living Centre. The Board was given a very warm welcome and a real insight into the way services have been improved for customers and the local community. Members were very impressed by the dedication and commitment of all the staff they met from Leeds City Council. The visits highlighted the importance of hearing about the issues facing councils as they get on with the job of serving local areas.

2. The Improvement and Innovation Conference that was held in Leeds on 22 March 2011 saw the formal launch of the LG Group's proposals for self regulation in our paper entitled '**Taking the Lead**'. Cllr Judith Blake, Deputy Leader of Leeds City Council gave the welcome address at the conference and spoke about the particular improvement challenges that the council has faced.

3. The publication of 'Taking the Lead' follows a lengthy period of consultation and discussion with the local government sector. The seven-point offer includes a number of new free of charge/subsidized tools local authorities can use to explore how effectively they are delivering services, including "Peer Challenge".

4. Councillors taking leadership of a local authority for the first time after a change in political control following the May local elections are being offered five days of peer support to help them in their new roles. The Local Government Group will make experienced councillors and local authority leaders available to provide five days of mentoring. The support, which is free-of-charge, will be available within the first few weeks of a change of political control.

5. There was a clear demand from councils in response to the consultation on '*Taking the Lead*' for councils to be able to compare data to help build the evidence needed to make informed decisions, reduce costs and improve services. **LG Inform**, a new service from the LG Group to meet this demand from councils will be the subject of a presentation to the May meeting of the Board. Members will be invited to offer guidance on next steps and in particular how LG Inform can be shaped to be of greatest benefit to Council Leaders and senior members. The first stage of the new service will be operating from end June/early July.

6. The May Board meeting will receive an update on work the LG Group is beginning to undertake to influence revised **EU procurement Directives**. The Group last month submitted a response to an EU Green Paper consultation exercise on procurement modernisation.. The response suggests that more coherent, consistent and above all significantly simplified EU legislation is required, in line with councils' needs to make efficiency savings. Cllr David Parsons and Cllr Dave Wilcox (Chair of

Item 4e

the LG Group European and International Programme Board) are both members of the Committee of the Regions and have recently secured valuable amendments on this topic. The amendments push for a more streamlined EU procurement regime and ensure that local and regional governments, EU-wide, call for:

- certain services such as health and social services to remain excluded from the principal requirements of the Directive
- simpler procedures when awarding contracts, including greater use of negotiation between the public authority and the provider
- significantly higher financial thresholds before the EU rules become applicable.

7. The May Board will also be discussing the Group's response to two consultations from DCLG – on the future of local public audit and on a proposed code of practice on data transparency.

8. The next phase of the **Local Productivity Programme** is currently being developed. A high level workshop on the theme of children, adults and families was held on 18 April. Political governance for this theme will be provided by the Children and Young People and Community Well-being Programme Boards. The first of a series of Futures Summits involving leading members and managers across public, private and voluntary sectors will be held on 23 May to shape the programme's 'future ways of working' theme.

9. The **Capital & Assets Programme** established by DCLG and the local government sector last year has worked with 11 Pathfinder areas (Cambridgeshire, Durham, Hackney, Hampshire, Hull, Leeds City Region, Leicester/shire, Solihull, Swindon, Wigan, Worcestershire). The programme sought to establish the efficiencies and wider benefits from local areas working together to rationalise their land and property assets. Potential savings are substantial and it is intended that the programme should be rolled out to the wider local government sector. LGID are looking to provide a resource together with Local Partnerships and some free private sector technical expertise. A prospectus will be issued around the time of an intended Ministerial Announcement scheduled for late May/early June, which will be accompanied by a supporting communications programme.

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