

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

1. The May meeting of the Programme Board had a presentation from Department for Communities and Local Government official Julie Carney, who outlined the key issues in the consultation on new arrangements for **local public audit**. Board members wanted to see the burden of audit reduced. They did not support the proposal for statutory audit committees with a majority of independent members and they did not think that the proposal was either necessary or achievable. The Board would like to see the future scope of audit streamlined and focused on the accuracy of financial statements and issues of probity, with no value for money assessment.
2. The Board also had a presentation on **LG Inform**. This is an online service allowing councils to access, and if they choose, compare, key performance information, to help build the evidence needed to make informed decisions, reduce costs and improve services. It will be accessible to a range of users – and we anticipate councillors and senior officers using it as well as performance staff. The prototype will be launched at the Local Government Group's Annual Conference on 29 June at a session entitled: "Information is power: a new LG Group service to help you". LG Inform is part of **Taking the Lead**, our approach to sector self regulation and improvement, which sets out a seven point offer to councils from the Local Government Group. **LG Inform** responds to a clear demand among councillors and officers to be able to compare performance with other councils and other areas.
3. Also part of 'Taking the Lead' is the strong **Peer offer** which will be of benefit to all local authorities. It comprises:
 - 3.1 **Peer challenge**: a peer challenge available to all councils, free of charge, in the three-year period from April 2011. The scope will be flexible to the needs of each council but we would expect there will be some focus on corporate capacity and leadership because we know these are key factors in council performance and improvement.
 - 3.2 **Peer support**: an offer of up to five days free member peer support for all councils that have had a change of control in the recent local elections. The support is designed to help new Leaders hit the ground running by offering an invaluable insight into the best ways to build relationships with senior council staff, engage communities and implement a policy agenda.
4. A series of free events have been arranged at venues in different parts of the country by the LG Group to promote 'Taking the Lead' and the integrated offer around self regulation. Events will be held as follows:
 - 4.1 Thursday 7 July, Cambridge

- 4.2 Tuesday 12 July, Exeter
 - 4.3 Monday 18 July, London
 - 4.4 Tuesday 19 July, Newcastle
 - 4.5 Wednesday 20 July, Nottingham
5. These events will be aimed at senior members and directors with a further series of events aimed specifically at Leaders and Chief Executives in the Autumn. Further details are available on the events section of the Local Government Group website.
6. The pace and political impetus around **Community Budgets** has now accelerated following the interventions of the Board Chairman, Cllr Parsons, council leaders from the sixteen places and the LGA. Our recent stocktake of Community Budgets demonstrates that places strongly welcome the opportunity they provide to develop a framework for transforming services, making cashable savings across the public sector and delivering better services for vulnerable families. Working with Baroness Hanham and council leaders, we have identified four barriers to progress which we will be focusing on: movement into other policy areas and the link to payment by results funding; data sharing; governance issues, taking account of police and health reforms; and assessment procedures
7. The **Local Productivity Programme** held the first of the Futures Summits on Monday 23 May that looked at new and innovative ways of delivering council services. Cllr Paul Bettison hosted the event and a number of Board members took part, including Cllrs Jeremy Webb, Richard Stay and Tim Cheetham. Cllr Ruth Cadbury closed the event and summed up the discussion. A wide range of people attended the event from the public, private and voluntary and community sectors, with a significant number of councillors attending. Two further summits will be held in July and September.
8. The LG Group's innovation programme, **Creative Councils**, partnered by the National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts (NESTA), has invited councils to submit ideas for addressing some of the biggest medium and long-term challenges facing communities and local services. Over the next two years the aim is to work with a small group of creative, pioneering councils to develop transformational new approaches. Cllr Peter Fleming, who acts as the Board's 'champion' for innovation, will participate in the selection of up to 20 of the most promising ideas. The programme has generated a huge amount of interest across England and Wales, and in order to allow additional time for councils to submit ideas, the application deadline has been extended until noon on 20 June 2011. Further information is available at www.local.gov.uk/creative-councils

Contact officer: Liz Hobson

Position: Senior Adviser

Phone no: 020 7664 3229

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