

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

1. The Local Government Group's **Taking the Lead** initiative and proposals for sector self regulation and improvement had a high profile at the LG Group's Annual Conference, which took place in Birmingham at the end of June.
2. Cllr Jill Shortland, Vice Chair of the Board and Cllr David Simmonds, Children and Young People Programme Board, spoke at a workshop to explain the overall approach toward the support the LG Group is making available to councils. There was a particular focus on the practicalities and benefits to be gained from sharing and comparing key performance data, how the approach is being applied in children's services and the contribution peer challenge and support can make to improvement.
3. The conference also saw the launch of the prototype of LG Inform, the new data facility that will enable councils to share and compare key performance data. In addition, Cllrs Robert Light and Tony Arbour spoke at a Local Productivity Programme workshop on protecting front line services through new models of working. The workshop attracted nearly 200 delegates and demonstrated the appetite for practical productivity advice from members.
4. The Local Government Group has responded to the DCLG consultation on the **future of local public audit**. The response reflects comments from member councils and the firm views that members expressed at the last meeting of the Improvement Programme Board. In particular, the response opposes the creation of statutory independent audit committees as unnecessary and impractical. We argue that the future scope of audit should be focussed on the accuracy of the accounts and probity – but not value for money. We have also called for greater clarity around the timetable for allowing councils to appoint their own auditors.
5. At the next meeting of the Board on 19 July, Members will consider a presentation on **Knowledge Hub**, which is due to be launched in September. Building on the success of the Group's Communities of Practice, the Knowledge Hub is an online network designed to bring together people from all parts of the public sector to work together and share good practice. As it will help to facilitate local government-led approaches for increased data transparency, the tool will be particularly relevant to the work of the Improvement Programme Board.
6. The Board will also discuss a report on the **Creative Councils** programme, which the LG Group are collaborating on with the National Endowment for

Science Technology and the Arts (NESTA). Councils were invited to submit ideas for addressing significant challenges facing communities and local services. By the submission deadline last month, 137 councils had offered up innovative ideas. A shortlist of 20 ideas will be announced by the end of July. Councils will then be supported to develop their thinking and establish the potential for rolling out their ideas to other areas. If an idea proves to be a success, it may be one of five ideas that have the most potential to be mainstreamed, which will receive additional funding and support. Councilor Fleming is the Improvement Board's representative on the Creative Councils Steering Group

7. Following some high level discussions between Chief Executives and Departmental Directors, the Group is in the process of agreeing a set of principles with Government which will guide how Departments review their data requirements. The review is intended to lead to the publication of a **reduced single data list** in the autumn with a reduced burden on councils. The key principle is that data requirements should broadly follow accountability structures and that where data is required the reasons for collection must be transparent and only the minimum amount collected to enable the purposes to be fulfilled.
8. Centre for Public Scrutiny launched the final version of its new local accountability tool, **Accountability Works for You** (referred to in the LGG's Taking the Lead as the Accountability Charter), at the LGG Annual Conference. It is also publishing an interim report on the experience of local authorities who have been piloting the framework. All information will be available on www.cfps.org.uk/what-we-do/accountability-works.

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